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Kaleidoscopic Writing: A Feminist Psychoanalytic Reading of Selected Texts by Marguerite Duras

by

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Abstract

This thesis examines, through a mainly feminist psychoanalytical critical approach accompanied by a consideration of the colonial backdrop, the crucial interconnections between the psychological and the social through an analysis of "rewriting" in selected texts by Marguerite Duras. The thematic-driven analysis focuses on the following texts: *La Vie Tranquille* (1944), *Un Barrage contre le Pacifique* (1950), *Des Journées entières dans les arbres* (1954), *Le Ravissement de Lol V. Stein* (1964), *Le Vice-consul* (1966), *L'Amant* (1984), and *L'Amant de la Chine du Nord* (1994). Particular works are grouped together in order to foreground the ways in which Duras experiments with and reworks the instability of various boundaries – boundaries of self, sexuality, madness, memory, and fiction. Including texts from three different periods of Duras's writing career, the thesis describes and analyzes the evolution of Durassian characters and central themes, illustrated through rewriting, from a logocentric, male-centred approach visible in earlier texts to one embracing all facets of a feminine identity – the relationship with the mother and other family members, sexuality, madness, and selfhood – in the later texts. The kaleidoscope acts as the organizing metaphor for textual exploration, allowing the repeated aforementioned themes throughout the Durassian *œuvre* to overlap, reflecting and shedding light on one another and at the same time complementing each other.

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Abbreviations

I have used the abbreviations listed below for the titles of Durassian works that I cite frequently. The editions used are those given in the bibliography.

A	*L'Amant*
ACN	*L'Amant de la Chine du Nord*
BCP	*Un Barrage contre le Pacifique*
JEA	*Des Journées entières dans les arbres*
MC	*Moderato cantabile*
PCT	*Les Petits Chevaux de Tarquinia*
RLVS	*Le Ravissement de Lol V. Stein*
VC	*Le Vice-consul*
VM	*La Vie matérielle*
VT	*La Vie tranquille*

Introduction
Pieces of a Puzzle: Rewriting in Duras

> Chez Marguerite Duras [...] l'oeuvre ici ne s'écrit pas linéairement dans une histoire, elle sous-tend, derrière la reprise lancinante d'une même histoire, une autre histoire qui échappe à la remémoration et qui revient hanter le texte sous forme de réminiscence.
>
> -Suzanne Ferrières-Pestureau

If rewriting were considered to be an art form in and of itself, Marguerite Duras would certainly be named as one of its stars in twentieth-century French literature. The Durassian text is a canvas to which Duras has returned time and again in order to rewrite, re-frame, re-touch, re-adjust, re-present. Many readers of Duras believe that « [r]épéter, c'est toujours donner une dimension supplémentaire à ce qui est répété » (Bourgeois 171). In the Durassian fictional world, rewriting manifests itself through both repetition and revision. Although recycling fragments of previous texts may, in the eyes of some readers, carry negative connotations, in Duras this form of repetition has proven itself to be attractive and alluring for her readers, drawing them into a fictional universe marked by a *mélange* of frequent returns to previous texts combined with fresh revelations. Karl Beckson and Arthur Ganz insist on the crucial connections between repetition in literary form and the reader's satisfaction:

> [Repetition is] [o]ne of the fundamental devices of art. Just as a composer repeats his themes after their development and a painter echoes the line of a figure in another part of his composition, so a writer reuses various elements within his work, for, to be satisfied, the mind demands not only the new but also the recognition of the familiar. (208)

Choosing "rewritten" texts from Duras's vast corpus proves to be a task of selecting from an abundance of riches, given that the literary universe created by the author's writing that spans over fifty years is held together by an array of common places, thematic threads and ghosts that haunt the pages. One is faced with the possibility of studying a multitude of contrasts between love and hate, control and autonomy, despair and hope, power and vulnerability. And typical Durassian style is to revisit these common elements, both fictive and autobiographical, and to produce a series of texts incorporating similar characters, areas and accounts. Rewriting these dichotomies allows Duras to explore her present relationship with the past, as writing is both an act of the here and now and the archealogical investigation of the past. Although her writing becomes more fragmented in the latter period of her career ["classical" novel style presented in *La Vie tranquille* (1944) and *Un Barrage contre le Pacifique* (1950) versus the mixture of cinematic style images, flashbacks and snippets of dialogue in *L'Amant* (1984) and *L'Amant de la Chine du Nord* (1991)], some of the issues examined in Duras's earlier texts become more pronounced in the latter. A close reading of the selected Durassian texts will reveal the ways in which Duras revisits the core elements and her choice of narrative motifs to be recast, which will suggest conclusions as to why she repeatedly recreates a *mélange* of fictive and autobiographical elements. Through reinventing either central themes or characters and by alternating or altering relationships between power and

submissiveness, desire and indifference, love and hatred, Marguerite Duras invites the reader to accompany her in a journey of self-discovery.

In terms of critical writing, much has been written about Marguerite Duras, covering a number of topics and disciplinary fields including but not limited to desire, sexuality, alienation and absence, writing on the body, autobiography, violence, film studies, the maternal figure, and gender studies. Her literary works have been discussed from many theoretical perspectives – post-colonial, feminist, psychoanalytical, and the list goes on. Furthermore, her career as a writer was not limited to narrative fiction texts; her creative endeavours also included numerous plays and film scenarios, as well as journalistic pieces, critical essays, and personal journals. She often produced and directed her films and stage productions. According to Laure Adler, "Marguerite always considered herself to be a great writer […] [She] was authoritarian and opinionated […]" (Adler 194). Crossing over into different genres means that Duras reaches more than a purely literary audience; her fans are film goers and critics, theatre directors, students and professors of literature, and the leisure reader.

Providing an overview of the existing literature on rewriting and Duras better enables me to situate my own close reading and analysis of the chosen Durassian texts within the Durassian critique. One of the foci for Cathy Jellenik's analysis of *Un Barrage contre le Pacifique, L'Amant,* and *L'Amant de la Chine du Nord* is the concept of the evolving self through rewriting. Jellenik examines the instability of language that authors use to express the self. She argues that the

abundance of twentieth century philosophical thought on identity is marked by contradiction, doubt and transience, thus allowing authors reconsidering the inherent ambivalence of the self to flourish. Jellenik establishes a link between rewriting, subjectivity, and language within a semiotic framework. She draws from the theories of Roland Barthes, Julia Kristeva, and Jacques Derrida in order to fortify her argument concerning the rewriting of standard literary models. Jellenik also considers the theories of Friedrick Nietzsche and Emile Benveniste to support her notion of rewriting one's own subjectivity and selfhood. Her analysis of Duras's rewriting emphasizes the fragmented and incoherent nature of the Durassian self. In analyzing *L'Amant* and *L'Amant de la Chine du Nord,* Jellenik also discusses the link between these texts from the later period of Duras's writing career and *écriture féminine*, which for her involve woman's plural connections to the self, which are ultimately expressed through language. She underpins her argument on feminist rewriting by citing Hélène Cixous, Luce Irigaray, and Catherine Clément.

Leah D. Hewitt investigates women writers who, like Duras, are re-inventing and calling into question traditional autobiographical practices. Hewitt devotes a chapter in *Autobiographical Tightropes* to exploring *L'Amant* as a pivotal text that incorporates an array of elements found throughout the Durassian *œuvre*. Hewitt is concerned with the way in which Duras bypasses the constraints of traditional autobiography to write the self as an unstable and inconsistent

figure. Hewitt insists that in *L'Amant,* we see the rewriting of many Durassian texts:

> Stylistically and generically, *The Lover* is a hybrid that brings together elements of Duras's writing from other periods. […] *The Lover* […] pursues the scandalous subject matter of eroticism, violence, and sexual contact already found in the earlier works of the eighties such as *The Malady of Death* or "The Seated Man in the Passage". […] [T]he work [*The Lover*] takes up, in fact, much of the autobiographical material from her early novel, *The Sea Wall* […]. *The Lover* also tells stories that intersect with other works, such as the long story/novella entitled "Whole Days in the Trees", and her play, *Agatha.* (96-7)

Hewitt's exploration of the tensions between classical autobiography and modern perspectives on this genre allows the reader to follow the way in which Duras embraces a splitting of the feminine subject into I/she and views it as an opportunity to consider all factors which contribute to the subject's individuation.

In "La discontinuité chez Marguerite Duras d'après l'analyse de *L'Amant,*" Kumiko Sato examines, from a semantic and discursive point of view, the rupture or *la discontinuité* that occurs in the rewriting of *Un Barrage contre le Pacifique* in *L'Amant*. Sato moves from a semantic analysis and comparison of selected passages in *Un Barrage contre le Pacifique* and *L'Amant* to a consideration of the fragmented nature of narration or the continual alternation of the narrator's point of view. Sato also addresses the blurring of identities between narrator and protagonist *je* and *elle* which occurs in *L'Amant.*

Eileen Angelini discusses the link between memory and the rewriting of *L'Amant* in *L'Amant de la Chine du Nord* within the framework of autobiographical writing. Angelini insists that Duras's innovative strategies of

writing the self, which do not adhere to the more traditional, linear style of classically-written autobiography, do not place her work outside of the realm of autobiography. In fact, Angelini sees Duras's technique of rewriting the self at different points throughout her life as advantageous and as a form of enrichment to the genre of autobiography since it allows Duras to share several perspectives on her lived experiences with the reader. Duras's "autobiographical space" (Angelini 1996, 15), dispersed across time through the rewriting of autobiographical elements in her texts, provides a revealing look at a coherent picture of Duras's life. Angelini examines the ways in which Duras conveys these fresh perspectives to the reader through her variation of stylistic elements such as the narrative voice and the use of tenses from *L'Amant* to *L'Amant de la Chine du Nord*. Angelini also considers the way in which Duras reframes elements of the plot, such as the lover's interaction with the girl's family, in order to follow the author's own changing perspective from one text to another.

Sylvie Bourgeois believes that Duras's rewriting is bound up with the concept of attempting to repair, improve or arrive at a resolution of conflict that is so often at the heart of the Durassian text. Bourgeois asserts that the ball scene with its characters who appear as recumbent statues [« les personages, mis à mort, laissés pour morts, ou immobilisés dans des poses mortuaires » (6)] appear frequently throughout the Durassian *œuvre*. The reappearance of such motifs is important not only in their recurrence but also in the common Durassian themes associated with them: desire, fantasy, and conflict. She proposes a thematic-

driven analysis based on the stereotypes associated with this particular scene and their varied presentations in Duras's texts. She also presents a psychoanalytic reading of the evolution of the ball scene and its characters associated with death and immobility using Freud's theory on the family romance and the Oedipus complex, Otto Rank's *Le Traumatisme de la Naissance,* and Gilbert Durand's *Les Structures anthropologiques de l'imaginaire*. Her analysis moves from the negative -- scenes marked by indifference, disappointment, and frustration, to the positive as she asserts:

> Associés, dans les premières œuvres, à la rupture douloureuse, à l'interdit, et à l'injustice d'une domination cruelle, bals et gisants deviennent progressivement des moments de corps à corps fusionnels, des moments de transgression et de résistance à la loi. (275)

Béatrice Bonhomme uses *L'Amant de la Chine du Nord* as the focal point for her article on the rewriting of *L'Amant.* Bonhomme argues that the rewriting of the story of the young girl and her lover enables the reader to access the fundamental fantasies of the typical Durassian text: death, love, and voyeurism. She links rewriting the gaze to re-working sexual desire (*la jouissance)* and the pleasure derived from writing (*l'écriture)*. Rewriting voyeurism allows: 1) the character of the young girl to see herself as an other: « [L]e *je* de *L'Amant* est […] dédoublé, projeté en multiples appellations foisonnantes et extasiées: « jeune fille du bac » (*Amt* 21), « petit au chapeau de feutre » (29), [etc.] […] (Bonhomme 123), 2) other characters in the text to watch or gaze at the young girl (particulary men), and 3) the author to reflect on her self-representation and to create an

enduring image of the self. According to Bonhomme, the author's self-reflection through writing leads to self-acceptance: « [E]n se regardant à travers les signes de l'écriture, elle peut à nouveau aimer, s'aimer […] » (125).

Ever since my first encounter with Durassian texts, rewriting has been a concept that has attracted me and provoked my critical curiosity. My interest in Duras was initially sparked during my Masters programme. A feminist reading of *L'Amant* for a seminar course inspired me to read more Duras, and a first encounter with *L'Amant de la Chine du Nord* the following year left me intrigued by the obvious recycling of the storyline. Then of all the texts I could have studied during my first year as a PhD student, *L'Amant* was once again on my reading list. And just as essential themes, places, and people recur and are re-worked years later by Duras, my own focus on the text from years earlier was re-positioned. However, the fundamental question in my mind remained – why this rewriting?

By examining the concept and process of rewriting in selected Durassian texts, I hope in this thesis to contribute to the critical dialogue already generated by numerous scholars. A reading of these texts through a mainly feminist psychoanalytical critical approach accompanied by a consideration of the colonial backdrop (seen either directly in the texts themselves or in context at the time of their publication) will reveal the crucial interconnections between the psychological and the social. The lived experiences of this author (her childhood in Indochina, her relationship with her family and in particular, with her mother)

will also be considered as these thematic threads work their way through much of Duras's *oeuvre*. My textual analysis will focus on the following texts by Duras: *La Vie Tranquille* (1944), *Un Barrage contre le Pacifique* (1950), *Des Journées entières dans les arbres* (1954), *Le Ravissement de Lol V. Stein* (1964), *Le Vice-consul* (1966), *L'Amant* (1984), and *L'Amant de la Chine du Nord* (1994). I will group together particular works for each chapter of the thesis in order to concentrate on specific recurring motifs in Duras's *œuvre* in order to foreground the ways in which she experiments with and reworks the instability of various boundaries – boundaries of self, sexuality, madness, memory, and fiction. My analysis does not always move in linear progression from Duras's earliest text to her most recent work. The kaleidoscope acts as a metaphor for my textual exploration, allowing the repeated themes throughout the Durassian *œuvre* (the mother-child relation, the family, the love story, madness, autobiography) to overlap, reflecting and shedding light on one another and at the same time complementing each other. Like the kaleidoscope, the reconfiguration of elements of Duras's fictional world will allow the reader to observe the fluid, seemingly effortless movement of motifs from one text to another.

As mentioned above, the colonial setting within many of the texts themselves is considered in my examination of rewriting themes and re-presenting characters.[1] Duras's childhood in Indochina serves as the backdrop for *Un*

[1] Mireille M. Truong Rootham underlines the connection between the typical family life portrayed in Duras's texts and the Indochina setting: "La question du colonialisme n'est pas abordée directement par Marguerite Duras. Ce qui l'intéresse surtout sont les relations familiales qu'elle a connues et dont l'Indochine se trouve par hasard être le cadre inséparable. J'entends « familiales »

Barrage contre le Pacifique, L'Amant, and *L'Amant de la Chine du Nord.* Duras was born in 1914 in Gia-Dinh, near Saigon. In 1926, five years after the death of her father Henri Donnadieu, Duras's mother applied to the French authorities for a plot of land to farm rice paddies:

> The plots were called concessions and consisted of a few acres of land stolen from peasants and given by the authorities to whites interested in cultivating them. A decree had just been passed to encourage the small-scale colonist to own land made available in Cochin China, Cambodia and Annam. Thanks to this decree, Marie was entitled to a free 300-hectare concession. (Adler 38)

However, greed reigned on both sides since Duras's mother wanted double the amount of land she was granted and the French authorities were not willing to give out extra free land. In the end, she was granted permission to purchase the extra land, situated about eighty kilometers from Kampot in southwestern Cambodia, but her attempts to farm the land failed and she went bankrupt within a year (Adler 39, 49). This three year period, during which Marie Donnadieu planned for a prosperous future, attempted to bring her dream to fruition, and unfortunately saw its demise, coincided with the appearance of resistance movements in the colony.[2] Anti-colonialism had been rare since the French had successfully been able to repress any resistance. In 1927 the VNQDD (Viet Nam Quoc Dan Dang) or Vietanmese Nationalist Party was founded by a group of young, middle-class Tongkingese (Dalloz 22). The rebellion in Yen Bay

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au sens large – c'est-à-dire comprenant en plus de la mère, des frères et du père dans son absence (Monsieur Obscur), les domestiques, Hélène Lagonelle, l'amant chinois, et Anne Marie Stretter […]. » (8).

[2] According to Adler, the young Marguerite met her Chinese lover in 1929 and the affair lasted for almost two years (54, 61).

on February 9, 1930, instigated by the Nationalist Party, was followed by days of strike-demonstrations, work stoppages, and armed uprisings. Thousands of Vietnamese were arrested for political crimes and hundreds of rebels were put to death. The resistance elicited a harsh repression from the French colonial government:

> Since the VNQDD was a revolutionary party, it embarked upon a programme of propaganda, organization and carefully-timed action aimed primarily at triggering off a general uprising and overthrowing the French. […] On the night of 9 to 10 February 1930 the Annamite riflemen in the Tongkingese garrison in Yen Bay massacred their French officers. This mutiny was followed shortly afterwards by a series of lesser incidents. A general uprising was threatening. The colonial administration struck quickly and hard and the Yen Bay mutiny was suppressed on 10 February. […] Most of the leaders, including party leader Nguyen Thai Hoc, were executed. (Dalloz 22-3)

In 1930 the Indo-Chinese Communist Party was created by Ho Chi Minh (who was still called Nguyen Ai Quoc at the time of the party's birth) (Dalloz 23). This leader would take his place in history in 1954 as he led the Vietnamese army to victory over French colonial forces.

Le Vice-consul is set in Calcutta, a city settled on the east bank of the River Hugli. Calcutta was the capital of British India from 1773-1911 and also became the center of British private trade. Due to its strategic port location, Calcutta was a prime location for shipping cotton, coal, jute, opium, and indigo (Bhattacharya 174-5). One of the most unforgettable events in the city's twentieth-century history is the Great Calcutta Killings of 1946. Within four days a massive riot between Hindus and Muslims, sparked by "the direct action demanding a separate electorate for the Muslims" (Bhattacharya 176), left five to

ten thousand people dead and another estimated fifteen thousand wounded. India became independent in August 1947 (Stern 164).

My choice of feminist theoretical underpinnings for this analysis stems from the evidence present in both Marguerite Duras's fictional writing and her own statements in interviews [for example, her 1975 interview with Susan Husserl-Kapit, her interviews with Xavière Gauthier published in *Les Parleuses* (1974), her opinions expressed in *La Vie matérielle* (1987), and her comments found in *Marguerite Duras à Montréal* (1981)]. Duras's work and in particular the portrayal of women in her texts are receptive to the thinking and writing of Luce Irigaray, Julia Kristeva, Marianne Hirsh, and Nancy Chodorow. Both Duras's writing and the opinions she expressed publicly support the vision put forth by these feminist theorists of women making their own way in the world:

> [I]t is the women who talk, the women who decide. […] The men are forced to follow. They do it the best they can, but they lag behind. It's already the beginning of an inverted world. […] In my books, in my films, they [women] have a power that is almost involuntary. That's it, it isn't directed. It is. It's the difference between "being" and "appearing". It is power that operates directly, that functions directly. (Duras qtd in Husserl-Kapit 427)

The choice of Durassian texts for my analysis is thus anchored in the continual reappearance in these particular texts of "female characters [who] are mobile, independent, aware, active, and rebellious" (Husserl-Kapit 426) or who are moving toward individuation and self-representation. Although my chosen corpus includes one of Duras's very early texts, *La Vie tranquille* (1944), I consider *Un Barrage contre le Pacifique* (1950) to be the *point de départ* for my

argument. This text is multifaceted in that the motifs serving as the anchor for my analysis (the family, the mother-child relation, the love story, madness, and autobiographical writing) are all in this text. A close reading of the selected texts provides evidence of these pivotal themes and familiar representations of women as mothers, daughters and lovers found in *Un Barrage contre le Pacifique* and that haunt several other Durassian texts. By including texts from the three different periods of Duras's writing career, I show the evolution of Durassian characters and central themes (illustrated through rewriting) from a logocentric, male-centred approach visible in her earlier texts to one embracing all facets of a feminine identity – the relationship with the mother and other family members, sexuality, madness, and selfhood in the later texts.[3] Although the major focus of my analysis centres around Durassian women, I also include key male figures (for example, the vice-consul in chapter four) who necessarily play a pivotal role in the development and expression of the female self.

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[3] According to Yvonne Guers-Villate, three major periods are detected in Duras's writing career. The first period is comprised of Duras's earliest texts, *Les Impudents* (1943), *La Vie tranquille* (1944), *Un Barrage contre le Pacifique* (1950), and *Le Marin de Gibraltar* (1952), which are dominated by a realist approach to writing. The fictional characters in these traditionally constructed narratives are developed in relation to their commonplace actions of everyday life and the setting they "inhabit". This period of Duras's writing, unmarked by her later ambiguity, stays true to "realist writing [which] paint[s] a coherent environment that can purport to represent 'reality' " (Jellenik 21). The second period is marked by a diminution of narration and descriptive passages and an increase in dialogue. Texts such as *Les Petits chevaux de Tarquinia* (1953) and *Moderato Cantabile* (1958) are illustrative of these modifications in technique as well « des structures en contrepoint et leur complexité grandissante » (Guers-Villate 11). Guers-Villate asserts that with the publication of *Détruire dit-elle* (1969) a third period is discernible in Duras's work. The impersonal narrative voice characterizes this third period as well as the creation of « une structure contrapuntique qui transmettra dans la forme le thème majeur de l'œuvre: l'ambivalence de la passion et des effets du temps sur la passion » (12). Duras's break with the realist, conventional form of literary expression in the first period is marked by her movement toward an unstable, fluid form of writing that resists logic and order and is more in tune with a feminist vision of written expression.

Irigaray's theoretical position on mother-daughter relations and her rejection of the patriarchal mould for women's way of thinking, writing, and being in the world finds its echoes in Duras's vision of women, which is illustrated through the female fictional characters she creates. Both Irigaray and Duras consider the female body as a primary source of creation in terms of breaking with the traditional masculine approach to expression and ideals:

> Even though you have inside you your way of talking and writing, you have mountains of it inside you, and even though it is enough to begin expressing yourselves so long as it is with your vocabulary, your abstractions, and your own conceptualization, I think you are still afraid of the master: men. […] I think the future belongs to women. Men have been completely dethroned. Their rhetoric is stale, used up. We must move on to the rhetoric of women, one that is anchored in the organism, in the body. (Duras qtd in Husserl-Kapit 434)

Freud's account of sexual difference associates the notion of absence or negation with woman given that she lacks a penis. Freud asserts that sexual difference does not exist between the little girl and boy throughout the oral, anal and phallic phases. However, at the onset of the Oedipal stage, the little girl is oriented toward taking her father as love-object, instead of her mother:

> A female's first object, too, must be her mother […]. But at the end of her development, her father – a man – should have become her new love-object. In other words, to the change in her own sex there must correspond a change in the sex of her object. (Freud 21: 228)

For Irigaray and many other feminist theorists however, Freud's psychoanalytic theory provides *un point de départ* for creating positive images and representations of the female self. Irigaray is concerned with the message sent by Freud's theory on sexuality, which translates into woman as a negative mirror

image of man. Irigaray believes that this equation of absence with woman explains why woman has no place within patriarchal discourse and thus allows femininity to be expressed only "in its 'acceptable' form as man's specularized Other" (Moi 63). In opposition to Freud, Irigaray attempts to create a space for female sexual desire and to "replace Freudian notions of female deficiency and envy with those of plenitude and independence" (Jellenik 34).

Through her creation of the young girl in *L'Amant* and *L'Amant de la Chine du Nord*, Duras presents a portrait of a young woman who, in the awakening of her sexual desire, controls her sexual encounters and simply refuses to be either a sexual object for man's pleasure or the object of the male gaze.[4] By following the evolution of this young Durassian female protagonist from *Un Barrage contre le Pacifique* to *L'Amant* and *L'Amant de la Chine du Nord,* the reader can identify the ways in which rewriting permits a movement toward abandoning and even rejecting phallocentrism in favour of a more adequate representation of female subjectivity and sexual desire.

In Speculum de l'autre femme Irigaray posits that we only know the phallic feminine or woman as she is seen by man. Given that "woman" has existed solely as a reflection of man, man therefore cannot imagine the "feminine feminine":

> La rechute de l'Autre de son ciel étoilé dans les abysses de la psyché contraint donc bien le « sujet » à reconquérir de nouvelles limites à son champ d'implantation, à réassurer – autrement, ailleurs – sa domination.

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[4] Jellenik asserts that the motif of selfhood found in Duras's fictional writing provides exemplary illustrations of Irigaray's feminist thought: "The theories of feminist Luce Irigaray have many affinities with the development of Duras's notion of self" (34).

> [...] Mais comment aménager ces territoires obscurs, ces continents noirs, ces au-delà du miroir ? Comment maîtriser ces diableries, fantômes mouvants de l'inconscient, quand une longue histoire vous a appris à ne chercher et ne désirer que la clarté, le bien vu des idées (fixes) ? [...] Peut-être faut-il abandonner provisoirement la contemplation sereine de son empire pour domestiquer ces forces qui pourraient, dé(sen)chaînées, en faire éclater la conception même. Détour par *la stratégie, la tactique* et *la pratique*, du moins le temps de voir, de savoir, de s'avoir, y compris dans son décentrement. Le « sujet » biaise avec la vérité, la surveille du coin de l'œil, obliquement, pour tenter de s'approprier ce qu'elle ne peut pas, ne peut plus, dire. (Irigaray 168-9)

Irigaray attempts to subvert specularization, the argument that "Western philosophical discourse is incapable of representing femininity/woman other than as the negative of its own reflection" (Moi 62). She argues that the only subject recognized in traditional psychoanalytic theory is the masculine subject. Woman is represented only as a reflected image of man wherein she is portrayed as a negative or "lesser" man. Within phallocentrism, man speculates about himself, his surroundings and women but only through his own male eyes. In order to destabilize phallocentric theory and offer woman space for a self-determined representation, Irigaray suggests that we abandon the flat mirror that allows the subject to look only at itself for the curved speculum (an image with female specificity), allowing woman to examine her sexual specificity and express her perspective on the world and on her self (Grosz 1989, xxii).

For women writers like Duras, another way of severing the tie between classical patriarchal ideals and expressing the self is to incorporate innovative methods of (re)writing selfhood. In keeping with Irigarary's notion of female plurality, both in a woman's relation to her own sexuality and to language,

contemporary female authors who incorporate autobiographical elements into their fictional writing recognize the need to insist on the multifaceted, unstable character of the female self: "Like woman herself, feminine expression resists neat categorization. Unlike male-authored language, female articulation never denotes simply one concept" (Jellenik 37). Through re-presenting versions of a young girl whose "story" is based on aspects of Duras's lived experiences in *Un Barrage contre le Pacifique, L'Amant,* and *L'Amant de la Chine du Nord,* Duras illustrates the way in which rewriting contributes to the contemporary form of autobiographical expression and supports the feminist notion of the female plural, fluid self.

The family romance, a term created by Freud to describe a child's fantasy of being freed from one's family, is often considered to be a cornerstone of psychoanalytic theory and is necessary for a comprehensive overview of the point of origin for feminist theorists such as Nancy Chodorow, Luce Irigarary, and Julia Kristeva. In making the connection between psychoanalysis and literature, Marthe Robert examines the family romance that is often found at the heart of nineteenth century texts by authors such as Balzac and Flaubert. Robert suggests that that the family romance's essence (setting, subject matter and figures) remains constant and is a literary creation waiting to be realized:

> [C]e «patron» de récit peut varier sensiblement selon les cas et passer par différents degrés de développement, mais jamais il ne change de décor, ni de personnages, ni de sujet […]. [I]l intéresse évidemment d'abord la psychologie, mais c'est aussi un morceau de littérature silencieuse, un texte non écrit qui, quoique composé sans mots et privé de tout public, n'en a pas moins l'intensité et le sens d'une authentique création. (42)

The child sees his parents as god-like, all-powerful and an unwavering source of love and protection. In the eyes of the child, these parental qualities justify the child's vulnerability and weakness. As the child grows older and is no longer the centre of his parent's attention and affection (he regrets having to share his parents' love with his siblings), he feels betrayed and realizes that he must free himself from his parents who are now, in his opinion, imperfect and inferior to other parents occupying a higher-class position in society. In order to cope with and compensate for the child's disappointments with his parents, he creates a biographical story, fabricating a fairy tale about his adoption and the impending revelation of his wealthy, noble birthparents. The creation of this fantasy allows the child to have an outlet for the anger he felt toward his parents and, more importantly, permits the child to begin developing his own identity and a sense of independence necessary for becoming a situated adult:

> Obligé d'aller de l'avant sous peine de perdre le bénéfice de ses acquisitions, mais incapable de renoncer au paradis que malgré tout il croit encore éternel, il n'échappe au déchirement qu'en se réfugiant dans un monde plus docile à ses vœux, autrement dit en choisissant de rêver. C'est ainsi qu'il en vient à se raconter des histoires, ou plutôt *une* histoire qui n'est rien d'autre en fait qu'un arrangement tendancieux de la sienne, une fable biographique conçue tout exprès pour expliquer l'inexplicable honte d'être mal né, mal loti, mal aimé ; et qui lui donne encore le moyen de se plaindre, de se consoler et de se venger, dans un même mouvement de l'imagination où on ne sait ce qui l'emporte en fin de compte de la piété ou du reniement. (Robert 46)

Marianne Hirsch believes that Freud's family romance may be used as a departure point for "[defining] and [testing] the implications of oedipal

narratology for women" (54). Hirsh coins the term "feminist family romances" both to underline the importance of the traditional aspects of psychoanalysis pioneered by Freud and to emphasize the efforts of feminist theorists to re-envision female development and subjectivity. She asserts that the feminist writing and ways of thinking generated by theorists such as Chodorow, Irigarary, and Kristeva "offer a psychoanalysis much more in tune with the ideals of the feminist movement and [...] participate in creating a psychoanalytic feminism of enormous influence" (132).[5]

Unlike Freud and the family romance (which highlights the oedipal stage as the crucial formative period for a child), psychoanalytic feminists foreground their arguments in the pre-oedipal period, which is characterized by a fusion between mother and child (Hirsch 131). This integral point of feminist psychoanalytic thought supports my choice to include a discussion of the mother's role not only in the chapter devoted to the mother-child relationship but also in the chapters dealing with the family, the love story, and autobiography. In texts chosen for the chapters on the family, the mother, and the love story the

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[5] Robert's use of the family romance as the basis for analyzing nineteenth century narratives by authors such as Balzac and Proust skillfully illustrates the utility of this theory for fiction writers of this particular literary period. However, given that my textual analysis is largely based on the exploration of rewriting female characters – mothers, daughters, and lovers, and corresponding recurrent themes (sexuality and female sexual desire, mothering), I believe that Duras's work is more receptive to the feminist theoretical writing found throughout my analysis. As Hirsch points out, in Robert's text there is no analysis of female children (55). Lia van de Biezenbos also supports these assertions: « Il faut pourtant ne pas oublier que Freud se base sur l'exemple du garçon. [...] En respectant le complexe d'Oedipe et en restant fidèle aux idées de Freud, Robert ne cite que des romanciers masculins pour soutenir sa thèse que le roman familial du maître se trouve à la base de toute création romanesque » (52-3). Since a large part of my thesis focuses on female characters playing their respective roles as daughters, sisters, and lovers, Robert's text is useful for my purposes in this thesis in establishing the Freudian family romance as a departure point for feminist theorists.

father simply does not play a defining role in the daughter's life. Indeed he is often simply absent. As Hirsh discusses the Durassian family in *L'Amant,* she asserts that " [i]n this family, the primal psychic triangle defining the narrator's individuation does not consist of mother/father/daughter but of mother/son/daughter, with the brother split into two, one good, one bad" (149).[6] Hirsch also points out that in Freud's family romance, the mother is simply "an instrument in the central drama between father and son" (55). If we consider Freud's family romance and its connection to (re)writing the core story, in Duras (re)writing does not simply reiterate the daughter's disappointments with her parents (or in Duras's case, mostly with her mother) and her consequential and sequential distancing. Durassian (re)writing is rather an attempt to offer different perspectives on the difficult bond, formed in the pre-oedipal period, that serves as the basis for adulthood:

> Whereas for Freud the process of imagination and the activity of fabulation are motivated by loss and by the longing for liberation from familial constraints, for feminist theorists [...] the imagination is fueled either by a longing to reexperience symbiotic union with the mother (by identification with her) or by a struggle against an identification which still reveals a profound and continued closeness. (Hirsch 133)

Chodorow's view on gender difference and a girl's retention of pre-oedipal maternal attachments is pertinent for my analysis of the Durassian daughter who reappears throughout Duras's *œuvre*. Chodorow posits that a girl's

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[6] My goal of solidifying the link between rewriting and my chosen theoretical support is further strengthened by the presence of this triadic formation in *Un Barrage contre le Pacifique* and *L'Amant de la Chine du Nord.* In *La Vie tranquille* the father is indeed "present" in the text. However, it is Françou's brother Nicolas whose death provokes a questioning of her own individuation.

continuing identification with her mother influences the way in which the daughter defines herself more often as having flexible and fluid ego boundaries as opposed to the rigidity and firm differentiation that characterize the typical masculine sense of self. As I demonstrate over the course of my analysis of female selfhood in the Durassian fictional universe, Duras's rewriting of the self is an exemplary illustration of Chodorow's feminized view of female psychic development as Duras re-presents a heroine whose identity is both in flux and yet in tune with the social context within which the girl finds herself. As Chodorow best explains, "[T]he basic feminine self is connected to the world, the basic masculine sense of self is separate" (169).

Freud's account of the girl's Oedipus complex pivots on the necessary detachment from the mother in order for the daughter to move toward taking the father as love object. Although the girl must separate from her mother, she continues to identify with her in order to learn to model feminine attributes displayed by her mother. The daughter begins to construct her own identity around her identification with a castrated mother who is powerless and undermined by patriarchal discourse:[7]

> No doubt her [the daughter's] turning away from her mother does not occur all at once, for to begin with the girl regards her castration as an individual misfortune, and only gradually extends it to other females and

[7] Adrienne Rich's *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution* explores mothering as defined under patriarchy and the way in which biology ties woman to a definitive representation of her femininity: "To have borne and reared a child is to have done that thing which patriarchy joins with physiology to render into the definition of femaleness" (Rich 37). Rich claims that man's ideal of motherhood stifles any chance of woman creating and embracing an identity outside of being a mother: "Institutionalized motherhood demands of women maternal "instinct" rather than intelligence, selflessness rather than self-realization, relation to others rather than the creation of self" (Rich 42).

> finally to her mother as well. Her love was directed to her *phallic* mother; with the discovery that her mother is castrated it becomes possible to drop her as an object [...]. This means, therefore, that as a result of the discovery of women's lack of a penis they are debased in value for girls just as they are for boys and later perhaps for men. (Freud 1973, 160-1)

Through her exploration of the mother-daughter relation, Irigaray hopes to underline woman's social function beyond reproduction and nurturance. In her text *Et l'une ne bouge pas sans l'autre,* she focuses on the mother's entrapment within the family romance, bound to "her role in a script she has not written" (Hirsch 137) and to the daughter's plea to not be tangled in the same web of patriarchy because of her bond with the mother. The mother, limited to a role as nurturer and having no access to a social role other than that of mother, directs her energies toward satisfying all the needs of her daughter. The daughter can only recognize the mother in her nurturing role and is unable to imagine her mother outside of maternity:[8]

> Tu me gardes, tu me regardes. Tu désires toujours que je sois sous tes yeux pour me protéger. [...] Toujours dépendante de quelqu'un qui me porte, qui me nourrisse. Qui me porte ? Qui me nourrisse ? [...] [T]u m'as enfermée dans ton manque de regard sur toi. (Irigaray 8, 16)

Irigaray proposes that the mother and daughter find mutual ground where they can exist as separate individuals while still holding strong ties to one another (Hirsch 137):

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[8] The difficulty of fostering a healthy mother-daughter relationship due to the mother's lack of self-representation outside of maternity and the daughter's need to identify with a mother who defines herself not only as a mother but also as having a socially legitimate position are discussed again in *Le Corps-à-corps avec la mère:* « [U]ne mère, c'est quoi? Quelqu'une qui fait des gestes commandés, stéréotypés, qui n'a pas de langage personnel et qui n'a pas d'identité. Mais comment, pour nous les filles, avoir un rapport personnel et se constituer une identité par rapport à quelqu'une qui n'est qu'une fonction ? » (Irigaray 86)

> J'aimerais tant que nous soyons là toutes les deux. Que l'une ne disparaisse pas en l'autre ou l'autre en l'une. Que nous puissions nous goûter, nous toucher, nous sentir, nous écouter, nous voir – ensemble. (Irigaray 10)

In *Un Barrage contre le Pacifique, L'Amant,* and *L'Amant de la Chine du Nord* the Durassian mother-daughter relation manifests the crippling nature of a phallocentrically-defined maternity and the limitations it imposes on both the mother's and daughter's identity as a woman.

Ruth de Kanter underlines the importance of recognizing a mother's role within a social context and not simply her role as mother. De Kanter believes that such recognition aids in the process of the daughter's differentiation. The daughter's ability to place her mother within a social context and the mother's capability to "acknowledge the daughter as a situated girl or 'woman-in-development' " (de Kanter 26) is, for de Kanter, one of the critical steps in the daughter's developmental process. De Kanter, like Irigaray, advocates for an acknowledgement of the mother as an active participant in the child's development as opposed to Freud's view of the mother as a mere passive stepping stone in the child's individuation:

> If the story of individual development, as Freud tells it, rests on a process of separation from the mother, then the mother's own part in that process remains absent, erased from theoretical and narrative representation. (Hirsch 169)

Like the aforementioned feminist theorists, Kristeva's interests are also often focused on the maternal. Her theory on abjection and maternity explores the

emerging subject and the shifting boundaries between mother and child in the pre-oedipal or semiotic phase. According to Kristeva, the semiotic is a period during which the child perceives the world through the indications, fluctuations and rhythms of the mother's body (Reinke 22). Kristeva believes that although this maternal space falls under the "law" of the symbolic, it is sometimes capable of crossing its border with the symbolic and spilling over, "seek[ing] to intervene into the symbolic to subvert its operations" (Grosz 1989, xxi). The ability of the semiotic to invade the symbolic is positive from a feminist perspective in that it allows maternal representation in a paternal dominated space.

The concept of abjection involves the child's struggle to become a unified self, separate from the mother, and to gain access to symbolization or become a speaking subject. In order to fully understand abjection and the way in which it relates to the child's subjectivity, we need to consider the corporeal self:

> The ability to take up a symbolic position as a social and speaking subject entail the disavowal of its modes of corporeality, especially those representing what is considered unacceptable, unclean or anti-social. The subject must disavow part of itself in order to gain a stable self [...]. (Grosz 2008, 86)

One of the cornerstones of Kristeva's essay on abjection, *Pouvoirs de l'horreur,* is a modification of one of Freud's assertions in *Totem and Taboo: Some Points of Agreement between the Mental Lives of Savages and Neurotics*. According to Freud and his theoretical findings based on an analysis of Australian aboriginal tribal behaviour, society is centred around the prevention of "improper" incestuous relationships:

> [W]e find that they [Australian aborigines] set before themselves with the most scrupulous care and the most painful severity the aim of avoiding incestuous sexual relations. Indeed, their whole social organization seems to serve that purpose or to have been brought into relation with its attainment. (Freud 2)

Kristeva's essay examines the child's acquisition of a stable subjectivity, a process that includes attempting to expel the unclean or chaotic from the body. It is important to highlight the notion of "attempt" here since Kristeva's concept of the abject rests on the impossibility of a complete expulsion of the disorderly from one's existence, thus putting the subject's stability at risk: « Ce n'est donc pas l'absence de propreté ou de santé qui rend abject, mais ce qui perturbe une identité, un système, un ordre. Ce qui ne respecte pas les limites, les places, les règles. L'entre-deux, l'ambigu, le mixte » (Kristeva 12).

Grosz defines the abject as "an abyss at the borders of the subject's existence, a hole into which the subject may fall when its identity is put into question" (1989, 72). In terms of mother-child relationships, the child needs to establish a boundary between her or himself and the mother. However, the child simultaneously wishes to remain in a period of fusion with the mother:

> De l'archaïsme de la relation pré-objectale, de la violence immémoriale avec laquelle un corps se sépare d'un autre pour être, l'abjection conserve cette nuit où se perd le contour de la chose signifiée et où n'agit que l'affect impondérable. (Kristeva 17)

In chapter one I look at the importance of the family in terms of a young woman's identity formation and the recasting of the "typical" Durassian family unit in *La Vie tranquille, Un Barrage contre le Pacifique* and *L'Amant.* The

complexity of the family in Duras's texts is characterized by the interconnections between sexual and incestuous relationships, racial stereotypes, and social class. The young woman portrayed in *La Vie tranquille* suffers from the absence of solid parental figures and a general lack of direction that leads her to a life marked by boredom. The girl, who has not yet developed her own identity, reappears later in *Un Barrage contre le Pacifique* and *L'Amant*, but her situation in those texts is further complicated by the pain of dealing with traumatic violent outbursts and domination by her mother and eldest brother. Traces of incestuous behaviour are found in all three texts, which further complicate the process of differentiation and identity formation. In the Durassian fictional world, the family may play by its own set of rules, turn a blind eye to a normally taboo behaviour, or even permit a crime to be committed within the home. Violence is an accepted part of daily life in the Durassian family culture – the family covers up an uncle's murder, committed by one of their own in *La Vie tranquille,*[9] the eldest son regularly threatens the younger brother with physical abuse in *L'Amant,*[10] and the mother beats the daughter on the suspicion that she has lost her virginity in *Un Barrage contre le Pacifique.*[11] In the latter two texts, the family has no power to change its

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[9] « Mais en le [Nicolas] protégeant contre la justice, nous nous conduisions comme si c'était nous qui lui donnions ce droit. Nous en gâtions la pureté et du même coup tout le plaisir de Nicolas. Pour lui plaire, il aurait fallu être imprudents » (*VT* 22).

[10] « Régulièrement des batailles éclatent entre mes frères, sans prétexte apparent, sauf celui classique du frère ainé, qui dit au petit : sors de là, tu gênes. Aussitôt dit il frappe. Ils se battent sans un mot, on entend seulement leurs souffles, leurs plaintes, le bruit sourd des coups. […] Ils sont doués de la même faculté de colère, de ces colères noires, meurtrières, qu'on n'a jamais vues ailleurs que chez les frères, les sœurs, les mères » (*A* 74-5).

[11]« -Une saleté de fille comme j'ai là…

inferior position in colonial society; thus family members cling to any possibility of claiming their "rightful" place among the upper class white population, regardless of the weakening effect it may have on their bonds to each other. The relationship between brother and sister is often dysfunctional as sexual boundaries are sometimes crossed or the sister's sexual encounters with other men become controlled by the brother. Brother or sister may also be seen as a protector and/or nurturer for the other sibling, shielding him or her from painful indifference or outright abuse within the family.

In chapter two I study the motherhood paradigm in *Un Barrage contre le Pacifique* and follow through with an analysis of the ways in which Duras revisits this connection between mother and child in *Des Journées entières dans les arbres.* I propose as well to examine two of her more recent texts in this chapter, *L'Amant* and *L'Amant de la Chine du Nord* in order to evaluate how the central theme of mother and child has been transformed. As a departure point, I will look at *Un Barrage contre le Pacifique* in order to study the process whereby the young woman attempts to leave her mother and devote herself to writing. This negotiation between staying with the mother or finding one's own identity is highlighted in all these texts. By incorporating *Des Journées entières dans les arbres,* I examine the relationship between mother and son as opposed to concentrating solely on the bond uniting mother and daughter. This juxtaposition allows me to rethink maternity within the text using a psychoanalytical and

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[...] Elle [la mère] s'était jetée sur elle [Suzanne] et elle l'avait frappée avec les poings de tout ce qui lui restait de force. [...] Joseph n'avait pas protesté et l'avait laissée battre Suzanne » (*BCP* 135-36).

feminist framework provided by works such as Nancy Chodorow's *The Reproduction of Mothering: Psychoanalysis and the Sociology of Gender* (1978); *Like Subjects, Like Objects: Essays on Recognition and Sexual Difference* (1995) by Jessica Benjamin and Adrianne Rich's *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution* (1976). This is, in my opinion, an interesting endeavour as the traditional triangular structure of mother/father/child is missing in many of Duras's texts. The father's absence in all the texts studied in this particular chapter, which is symptomatic of a pervasive lack of masculine archetype, merits discussion as it emphasizes the mother's domination within the fictional universe created by Duras.

Chapter three examines desire and a shifting balance of power that are at the heart of the love story re-envisioned in *Un Barrage contre le Pacifique, L'Amant* and *L'Amant de la Chine du Nord.* Duras positions the family as active participants in the love affair between the young girl and her male suitor; indeed family members are essentially the keepers of both the daughter's virginity and her monetary value. I consider the link between the need for independence and its expression through sexuality in an attempt to answer several questions. For example, how are power relations recoded in these texts and what role does desire play in rewriting power? I explore the multiple sites of marginalities that stem from and are re-presented through the interaction of the sexual, racial, and social in the colonial setting of the literary works. Desire resonates throughout the texts and is crucial to an examination of rewriting in the Durassian *oeuvre* as it is a

distinctive feature that permeates the entire corpus. Desire manifests itself through incestuous relationships, sexual relations between lovers, and attempted disconnections with the family. As physical or sexual desire fluctuates, so does the desire or craving for power. The struggle for power also finds its origins in the colonial, class and race-based society in which the love story unfolds. Conventional gender and sexual boundaries are often crossed in these texts. Expected gender-specific norms are disputed and sometimes shattered, while questions of objectivity and subjectivity are intricately linked to the balance of power. I address female desire and the gaze in Duras as these relate to a reframing of women's traditional role as object of male desire.

In chapter four I examine how Duras reworks madness in *Le Ravissement de Lol V. Stein* and *Le Vice-consul. Le Ravissement de Lol V. Stein* serves as a departure point for several later literary works to follow by Duras as we see the reappearance of particular characters, fragments of storylines and thematic similarities. This text epitomizes the notion of rewriting since the plot is obsessively focused on the idea of repeatedly trying to relive a particular event, the night at the ball. The very concept of madness surfaces time and again in Duras and its existence as a fundamental part of a text is often easily detected. Duras has made madness a focal point. In *Le Ravissement de Lol V. Stein,* the narrator attempts to piece together the reasons behind Lol's mental insanity. The very structure of the text is symptomatic of madness since readers feel as though they are trapped in a never-ending circular pattern of reading about Lol's repeated

attempts to reenact the scene at the ball. If Lol is not returning to the rye field to voyeuristically take part in the triangulation with Jacques Hold and Tatiana Karl, the reader is aimlessly following her around the town in circles as she wanders through the streets. The reader is brought on a similar journey in *Le Vice-consul,* where the text focuses on the importance of returning this time to two original scenes of hopelessness and loss: the shooting at the lepers in the Shalimar Gardens and the beggar woman's separation from her mother and village. My analysis of the symptoms of madness that are re-presented from *Le Ravissement de Lol V. Stein* (1964) to *Le Vice-consul* (1966) hinges on the interaction of the social (the bourgeois society in *Le Ravissement de Lol V. Stein)*, the political (colonial backdrop in *Le Vice-consul)* and the psychoanalytical in the two texts.

L'Amant and *L'Amant de la Chine du Nord* serve as the literary textual base for my evaluation of autobiographical elements inscribed through rewriting in chapter five. Here memories of and separation from the real people and places that inspired Duras's writing play a pivotal role in the creation of the autobiographical elements of her texts. For example, the writing of *L'Amant* occurred seven years after the death of her own mother, while *L'Amant de la Chine du Nord* was published several years after her real life Chinese lover had passed away (Adler 378). Memories are not only transformed by the passage of time; they are also altered in order to satisfy what Duras believes is the image of herself as a young white woman living in a colonial setting with her poverty-stricken, racist family. Duras admitted to drawing from her past life experiences

for her texts: "People always write books about themselves. Invented stories are not my thing. I don't have the words for that" (qtd. in Adler 365). Indeed *L'Amant* has been declared the most realistic version of Duras's life, although it is necessary to note that people, places and events from her real life are scattered throughout many of her works. *L'Amant de la Chine du Nord* was written in response to a filmic misrepresentation of *L'Amant.* The manuscripts of the screenplay that Duras wrote for *L'Amant* (a screenplay that in the end was not used for the film as Jacques Annaud and Gérard Brach prepared their own script based on the novel) reveal the ways in which she reworked this script and transformed it into a novel (Adler 378). In both novels the reader sees a depiction of the family and of the affair between the young girl and her Chinese lover in a colonial context; however, the dynamics between characters vary from the earlier work to the later. Memory and fiction are combined to create what Duras believes, in the present act of writing, to be a valid representation of the places in the text (the family bungalow, the lover's apartment, colonial society) and the "people" who inhabit them or are associated with them. These spaces and people all contribute to the formation of the young Marguerite's textual identity. According to Leslie Hill, "Duras's stance with regard to her own text is therefore not one of sober detachment dominated by a commitment to telling the truth, but of desire rediscovered and relived in retrospect" (Hill 1993, 123). The time that separates Duras in the present act of writing from the lived experiences that serve as inspiration for her texts permits a return to the original source of desire, but at

the same time, the author textually recreates this desire from a fresh perspective. I also consider in this chapter the concepts of subjectivity and objectivity where rewriting the self is concerned. Duras's cinematic-style writing brings the role of the gaze to the forefront, allowing an interspersion of je and elle and a splitting of the self into subject and object. Gender, class and race play a part in reinforcing this fluctuation in the female protagonist's position, either as the subject of or within discourse. As the protagonist is split into numerous versions of the self – daughter, sister, lover, I, she, the girl – the development of selfhood is a critical theme in a text where the plot is dominated by "[a] narrator/protagonist who sees herself as part of a newly emerging feminist generation" (Hirsch 138-9).

In summary, the main focus of this thesis is to study the rewriting of particular themes that occur in several of Marguerite Duras's texts. Studying how and what Duras rewrites in these literary works is to examine what motifs are intermingled from one text to another but also to analyze the ongoing themes of madness, desire, motherhood, etc. For example, the reader may pinpoint a repeated scene but notice at the same time that this segment has been somehow altered. Phrases are carried over from any given text only to appear in a later work. Characters materialize in a particular text and the reader is left with a feeling of *déjà vu* as the character itself or some version of it is evident in a previous text. « Écrire, c'est finalement ne pas pouvoir éviter d'éternellement répéter, réécrire en modifiant, déplaçant, variant sur le déjà écrit » (Bourgeois 5). The colonial backdrop, presented in many of the chosen texts, must be taken into

account as it has a direct influence on the reworked elements that I will analyze from a psychoanalytic perspective (motherhood, madness, familial relations, relationship between lovers). The originality of my analysis stems from the study of these aspects through the rewriting process.

Chapter One: The Family Portrait

> Dans les histoires de mes livres qui se rapportent à mon enfance, je ne sais plus tout à coup ce que j'ai évité de dire, ce que j'ai dit, je crois avoir dit l'amour que l'on portait à notre mère mais je ne sais pas si j'ai dit la haine qu'on lui portait aussi et l'amour qu'on se portait les uns aux autres, et la haine aussi, terrible, dans cette histoire commune de ruine et de mort qui était celle de cette famille dans tous les cas [...] (34).
>
> -Marguerite Duras

The family unit in Duras's works is often tinged with hardship, misery, indifference and suffering. The typical Durassian family portrait is painted as a grim representation bearing negative connotations. The complexity of the family in Duras is characterized by the intertwining of its social, familial and sexual relationships. The ensemble of texts to be discussed in this chapter, namely *La Vie tranquille, Un Barrage contre le Pacifique* and *L'Amant,* showcase the intricate and perplexing relationships that exist between siblings and parents in Duras's literary world. Familial love is sometimes a twisted version of the societal norm, bearing traces of incest, domination, abuse and even murder. In this chapter the force and influence of the family on the young female protagonist in each of these works are put under the microscope. I examine how certain aspects of these relationships are repeated and become more pronounced over the narrative trajectory of the three novels. The ways in which the female characters transcend boundaries and polarities and develop their consequential identities are also

discussed. The influence of societal elements is also a point to be considered when examining the Durassian family. For example, like the country they inhabit in two of these texts, namely *Un Barrage contre le Pacifique* and *L'Amant,* the family itself is drowning in conflict and involved in a war based on authority. This colonial setting and the sense of victimization (present in all three texts) have aided in shaping the families to be examined.[1]

Albert Memmi has discussed the interdependent relationship between the colonizer and the colonized in *Portrait du colonisé, précédé du portrait du colonisateur.* He explains, from the point of view of the colonized and the colonizer, how and why the colonized group is exploited, how the portrayal of his otherness is cast in a negative light and how the colonial situation affects the conscience of both groups. In *Un Barrage contre le Pacifique* and *L'Amant,* for example, the family's financial ruin due to the repeated flooding of the land purchased from the corrupt French colonial administration gives rise both to the mother's insanity and to the events derived from this amalgam of history and personal struggle:

> Le docteur faisait remonter l'origine de ses crises à l'écroulement des barrages (*BCP* 22). [...] Le docteur n'avait pas tellement tort. On pouvait croire que c'était à partir de là que tout avait vraiment commencé (*BCP* 30). [...] J'ai [la mère] travaillé pendant quinze ans et pendant quinze ans j'ai sacrifié jusqu'au moindre de mes plaisirs pour acheter cette concession au gouvernement. [...] Je vous ai donné tout ce que j'avais ce matin-là, tout, comme si je vous apportais mon propre corps en sacrifice, comme si

[1] In *Emily L.* (1987) the narrator refers to growing up in Indochina and to her recurring memories of this part of her life: « J'ai dit que je connaissais les Asiatiques, qu'ils étaient cruels, que sur les routes ils s'amusaient à écraser les chiens moribonds de la plaine de Kampot avec leurs voitures. J'ai parlé de la mer grise des tropiques, plate. Et puis du Siam, encore, derrière la montagne. [...] [J]e revien[s] surtout et inlassablement sur le Siam, ce ciel au-dessus de la montagne [...] » (47).

> de mon corps sacrifié il allait fleurir tout un avenir de bonheur pour mes enfants. Et cet argent, vous l'avez pris. (*BCP* 289-90)
>
> Je [la fille] dis que nous n'avons pas d'argent. […] Je lui parle [au Chinois] des barrages. Je dis que ma mère va mourir, que cela ne peut plus durer (*A* 51). […] Je lui dis qu'on était dehors, que la misère avait fait s'écrouler les murs de la famille et qu'on s'était tous retrouvés en dehors de la maison […]. (*A* 58)

In *L'Amant* the narrator refers to the family's life as « cette histoire commune de ruine et de la mort qui était celle de cette famille dans tous les cas » (34). And in an earlier Durassian text, *La Vie tranquille* (1944), the author presents a young woman named Françou and the manner in which the discovery of life beyond her family's home leads to a questioning of her own personal quest in life, a true journey of self-discovery.

Violence: The Tie that Binds

In the Durassian narrative universe, violence is an accepted form of dealing with interior and exterior influences on the family; and the reader witnesses this theme revisited over the course of the three novels. The three families are depicted as victims as well, either of colonial society (as in *Un Barrage contre le Pacifique* and *L'Amant),* or of a reckless family member (as in *La Vie tranquille).* Violence and financial ruin seem to be bound together in the case of these texts. In *L'Amant* the young girl reflects on the domino effect of the injustice done to her mother by the French-ruled colonial government: « [N]otre mère, que la société a assassinée. Nous sommes du côté de cette société qui a réduit ma mère au désespoir. À cause de ce qu'on a fait à notre mère si aimable, si

confiante, nous haïssons la vie, nous nous haïssons » (69). The most extreme form of familial violence occurs in *La Vie tranquille* when Nicolas murders his uncle Jérôme. Jérôme had frittered away the family's wealth, leaving them in a difficult financial position and taking away the possibility of advancement for Françou and Nicolas. Jérôme had also infringed on the family on a more personal level, as he was having an affair with Clémence, the mother of Nicolas's child. This pent-up pressure finds an outlet when a fight between Jérôme and Nicolas ends in the uncle's death:

> […] c'était moi qui avais dit à Nicolas que Jérôme montait dans la chambre de Clémence, chaque soir, depuis trois mois. (16) […] Mais Jérôme devait disparaître des Bugues. Pour que Nicolas commence à vivre. Il fallait bien que cela cesse un jour. C'était arrivé. (*VT* 17)

This horrendous act on the part of Nicolas is covered up by the rest of the family, highlighting the fact that violent behaviour is a tolerated outlet for dealing with family politics. In the eyes of Françou's family, Jérôme deserved to pay for his malicious actions, even though the family had both financially supported Jérôme (the father had in past years been one of Jérôme's enablers through stealing money to pay off debts incurred from Jérôme's financial schemes) and they did not support the relationship between Nicolas and Clémence: « […] il [Nicolas] l'a mise enceinte et il a bien été obligé de l'épouser. […] Nous, nous n'étions pas de cet avis » (*VT* 15).

Violence is also the main channel for attempting to banish the daily strains on the family in *Un Barrage contre le Pacifique.* In *La Vie tranquille* we see a mixture of hatred and indifference that dominates the family structure, whereas in

Un Barrage contre le Pacifique it is a confusion of love and devotion, loathing and hostility. From *La Vie tranquille* to *Un Barrage contre le Pacifique* one can follow the increasing complexity of sibling and parent-child connections as domination becomes bound up with affection between siblings. The mother plays a much more critical role in family dynamics (as opposed to the passive, practically absent mother in *La Vie tranquille).* Indeed it is the mother in the latter of the two novels who is at the heart of this family's ruination with her never-ending quest to cultivate the land granted by the French colonial government. Her two children, Joseph and Suzanne, feel a need to protect their mother from spiraling downward into the depths of madness and depression, but at the same time, it is Joseph who often shields Suzanne from the random beatings meted out by their mother:

> […] la mère fixa Suzanne, les deux bras levés, comme prête à bondir […]. Joseph s'était levé et s'était approché de la mère.
> -Si tu y touches encore, lui dit-il doucement, une seule fois encore, je fous le camp avec elle à Ram. Tu es une vieille cinglée. (*BCP* 141)

As I discuss further in chapter two, the mother's madness is a result of years of fighting her way through the colonial system that should in reality favour her, since she is a French citizen. Yet rather than receiving her just due as a citizen of France, she is subjected to the same treatment allotted to the natives of the colonized country, not only because of her poverty but also due to her status as a single white mother. The children do not openly rebel against their mother since they are aware of the subordinate position the family occupies within the

colonial system. They understand that the colonizer group, which on the surface encompasses this family if one takes into consideration the colour of their skin, is the common enemy they must defeat. In *L'Amant* the thread connected to the colonial setting is carried through from *Un Barrage contre le Pacifique,* but the reader now has a new perspective on family dynamics as the young girl overtly goes against her mother's and older brother's wishes by repeatedly seeing her Chinese lover. The eldest son here can be compared to Jérôme in that he plays a part in sinking the family to the depths of financial despair and impoverishment. There are many puzzle pieces here that fit together in order to build the daughter's case of hatred directed at her brother, some of which are discussed at a later point in this chapter and will return in chapter two. The brother's contribution to the family's impoverishment helps to justify her mother's support of the daughter's prostitution:

> [...] il faudra bien que l'argent arrive dans la maison, d'une façon ou d'une autre il le faudra. [...] elle, saura peut-être un jour comment on fait venir l'argent dans cette maison. C'est pour cette raison, elle ne le sait pas, que la mère permet à son enfant de sortir dans cette tenue d'enfant prostituée [...] il vole les boys pour aller fumer l'opium. Il vole notre mère. Il fouille les armoires. Il vole. Il joue. (*A* 33, 94)

Sexual Permissiveness

The bond shared by sister and brother extends beyond mere protection from the mother's or the sibling's physical abuse. Both Suzanne and Joseph share a love of the song *Ramona,* which appears numerous times throughout the novel.[2]

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[2] In 1884, Helen Hunt Jackson, an American author, published a novel entitled *Ramona* that was extremely successful and has since been adapted for film and for theatre productions. Racism and

This song, which has long been a favourite for the siblings, reminds them of their childhood. The song is a symbol of the connection between brother and sister. It is important to note that the mother dislikes the tune and that M. Jo, one of Suzanne's suitors, takes pleasure in reminding them that the song is no longer popular in Paris. *Ramona* is associated with the children's desire to leave their mother and find happiness elsewhere:

> Il [Joseph] alla chercher ses vieux disques dont *Ramona* était le plus précieux. […] Lorsqu'ils partiraient ce serait cet air-là, pensait Suzanne, qu'ils siffleraient. C'était l'hymne de l'avenir, des départs, du terme de l'impatience. (*BCP* 85-6)

If one examines the verse from *Ramona* cited in the text, it is clear that the song alludes to lovers escaping together: « Ramona, nous étions partis tous les deux. […] Et jamais deux amants n'avaient connu de soirs plus doux… » (85). This reference, along with other hints peppered throughout the novel, raises the question of an incestuous relationship between Suzanne and Joseph.[3] An incestuous connection between the two is not as clearly stated as the one the reader sees between the girl and her younger brother Paulo in *L'Amant de la*

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hardship are two of the main themes that permeate the love story set against the backdrop of Mexican colonial life. Interestingly, the text ends with Ramona marrying her stepbrother, Felipe, after the death of Señora Moreno, Ramona's stepmother and Felipe's birth mother.

[3] One of the thematic elements detected in *La Pluie d'été* (1990) is the intense connection between brother and sister, Ernesto and Jeanne. The relationship between siblings described in this text is reminiscent of the bond between Suzanne and Joseph in *Un Barrage contre le Pacifique* (1950) and the girl and her younger brother in *L'Amant* (1984). The relation between Ernesto and Jeanne, like the sibling relationships in these other Duras texts, is marked by a fierce adoration and incest: « Les bras d'Ernesto s'étaient refermés sur le corps de Jeanne. Ils étaient restés ainsi, silencieux et les yeux baissés, cachés à eux-mêmes comme les amants de la nuit récente (34). […] Jeanne était allée dans le lit d'Ernesto, elle s'était glissée contre le corps de son frère. Elle avait attendu qu'il se réveille. C'était cette nuit-là qu'ils s'étaient pris » (112).

Chine du Nord,[4] but there is an evident confusion about where the line is drawn between Joseph being Suzanne's sibling or her lover:

> Aucun homme ne l'avait vue vraiment nue, sauf Joseph qui montait quelquefois se laver les pieds au moment où elle prenait son bain (*BCP* 72). […] Depuis qu'elle connaissait M. Jo, Suzanne le [Joseph] trouvait beaucoup plus beau qu'autrefois (*BCP* 128). […] La seule douceur de la vie c'était lui, Joseph. (*BCP* 141)

It is interesting to note that the name given to Suzanne's first suitor, M. Jo, bears the first syllable of Joseph's name. Comparisons are made throughout the novel between the two, but it is M. Jo who is always viewed as the one who is insignificant and lacking in comparison to Suzanne's brother (Bardet 35):

> Jamais Joseph n'avait eu de costume de tussor. Tous les costumes de M. Jo étaient en tussor (*BCP* 150). […] Quand ils [Joseph et Suzanne] se baignaient à Ram, M. Jo regardait Joseph avec un regard d'assassin. Mais d'un coup de poing Joseph aurait fracassé M. Jo. […] il était trop faible, trop léger pour Joseph […]. (*BCP* 125)

When Suzanne thinks of finding a lover, she thinks of finding a man like her brother : « J'aime mieux un chasseur, dit Suzanne (*BCP* 149). […] Suzanne se souvenait parfaitement de cette minute où elle sut qu'elle ne rencontrerait peut-être jamais un homme qui lui plairait autant que Joseph » (311). Her potential lovers must live up to the image of Joseph as seen through Suzanne's eyes. She

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[4] « Dans la glace passe l'image du petit frère qui traverse la cour. L'enfant l'appelle tout bas : Paulo. Paulo était venu dans la salle de bains par la petite porte du côté du fleuve. Ils s'étaient embrassés beaucoup. Et puis elle s'était mise nue et puis elle s'était étendue à côté de lui et elle lui avait montré qu'il fallait qu'il vienne sur son corps à elle. […] Quand il avait crié elle s'était retournée vers son visage, elle avait pris sa bouche avec la sienne pour que la mère n'entende pas le cri de déliverance de son fils » (*ACN* 209). In *L'Amant* references made by the narrator about her relationship with her younger brother are centred around a fierce love that could be compared to the unsurmontable bond between mother and child and which may be in part due to the rejection they feel in their mother's presence, knowing that her life revolves around the eldest son. The girl also fears for her youngest sibling's life as he is victimized daily by visious physical beatings from their older brother. In *L'Amant de la Chine du Nord* the narrator takes the relationship with her younger brother Paulo a step further by speaking openly about their sexual encounters.

sees M. Jo as occupying an inferior position in relation to her brother Joseph. In Suzanne's opinion, M. Jo is weak and unable to stir desire in her like Joseph. Like M. Jo, the Chinese lover in *L'Amant* is also depicted as weak and frail. He is portrayed as being intimidated by the girl from their initial meeting on the ferry. The description of his apartment and of his reaction to her first visit there mirrors how he is seen by the narrator: as fragile, unsure, vulnerable to the surrounding world:

> Le corps est maigre, sans force, sans muscles, il pourrait avoir été malade, […] il est très faible, il paraît être à la merci d'une insulte, souffrant (*A* 49). […] L'endroit est moderne, meublé à la va-vite dirait-on, […] Il dit : je n'ai pas choisi les meubles (*A* 47). […]Le lit est séparé de la ville par ces persiennes à claire-voie, ce store de coton. Aucun matériau dur ne nous sépare des autres gens. (*A* 53)

In *Forbidden Partners: The Incest Taboo in Modern Culture,* James B. Twitchell discusses culture's influence on incest and how the anxiety surrounding incest has been incorporated into fictional works since the turn of the nineteenth century. He acknowledges that the family is bound together by a myriad of responsibilities, rights and unspoken laws, and roles played by each individual but asserts that both biology and culture are factors to be considered when examining the bonds that hold a family together (Twitchell ix). With sexual reproduction and thus the continuation of the human species being the fundamental explanation behind sexual encounters, Twitchell believes that both language and culture allow humans to reiterate nature's plan. Genetic diversity is assured once interbreeding is avoided, allowing Twitchell to conclude that "genetic concentration

[interbreeding] defeats the purpose of the sexual process" (Twitchell 36). Twitchell discusses how the incest taboo could be a product of social stigma rather than a product of the natural aversion theory supported by some biologists, a theory that uses instinct and genetic variation as its underpinnings, and he draws on the skepticism of Edward Westermarck, a strong proponent of the biological explanation behind incest avoidance. Westermarck questions why the taboo would exist if humans were naturally 'programmed' to avoid incest. If we are not interested in carrying out a certain behaviour, then why forbid what we don't do? (Twitchell 33). Being concerned here with how different forms of art and media all carry the same message of incest avoidance, he places the social consequences of incest as the essential concern:

> It is not the genetic risk that is worrisome; it is the social one. The naming function of language by which we assert the father/mother/sister/brother/uncle/aunt/cousin placement may well be one of the strongest announcers and enforcers of the taboo. The process of naming is the process of categorizing, which is the unconscious establishments of limits, in this case sexual limits. (Twitchell 9)

The crucial semiotic role played by naming in incest avoidance supports Twitchell's argument of viewing incest as an "*uncultural* act" (Twitchell xi). Staying true to one's function (determined by the naming process) in the family structure, such as being a father or sister, means contributing to the harmony of that family structure. Stepping outside the confines of one's role and duties by transgressing sexual boundaries creates confusion and threatens to disrupt the family's continued existence. In Western cultures families generally follow the unspoken rule against breaking the social code for incest avoidance, and they are

aware of the dire consequences that would follow, such as a blemish that would tarnish the family's standing in the eyes of society. In Western cultures, semiotics plays a part in determining what is socially, but not necessarily personally, acceptable.

Psychoanalysts have long expressed interest in the connection between incest and the redirected libido. Traditional psychoanalysis is centered around parent-child incestuous relationships, and I have chosen to explore the allusive references to incest between mother and son present in *Un Barrage contre le Pacifique* and *Des Journées entières dans les arbres* in chapter two where my analysis is devoted to the dynamics between mother and child. Given that the father is generally absent in the Durassian texts chosen for my study, I will not be investigating this avenue with regard to incestuous relationships (I use the term *generally* here because as I explain later, the father or a father figure does play a role in the families examined here).

The incest taboo is often linked in psychoanalysis to the process of achieving autonomy and individuation. A psychoanalytical perspective on incest does not isolate sexual interaction from other crucial elements of incestuous relationships; it also encompasses a need for security, tenderness and belonging that cannot be found outside the family (Justice and Justice 29). The family environment and the condition of the family have a direct influence on the occurrence of incest. In the Durassian families presented in *Un Barrage contre le Pacifique* and *L'Amant*, the need for a balance between nurturing or a sense of

closeness between parents and siblings, and maintaining a level of independence is of extreme importance for the girl's differentiation and consequential separation from the family. Finding this balance is complicated by the delinquency from the social norm where sexual relationships are concerned. Certain attributes are associated with a daughter who is involved in an incestuous relationship: "She has a poor relationship with her mother, or none at all. […] She is looking for attention and affection. […] She may develop a seductive manner, look, or behavior to attract attention" (Justice and Justice 94).

Romantic relational issues with the opposite sex can sometimes occur for a daughter who comes from an incestuous family. The expectation that men are looking to exploit her sexually has become interiorized, and this belief often hinders her from developing a satisfying relationship. The goal of relationship development becomes skewed and confusion ensues about whether she is searching for a sexual relationship or simply warmth and devotion. This lack of clarity can and often does manifest itself as promiscuity (Justice and Justice 184). We see evidence of this in all three novels studied here. Françou in *La Vie tranquille* shows indecisiveness throughout the novel regarding her relationship with Tiène, the young man who has befriended her brother Nicolas. Not knowing much about his past or future, she speculates about his role in her universe. Nicolas's suicide then prompts Françou to act on her sexual desire for Tiène. Regardless of the uncertainty of the future of their relationship, she manages to find her way to Tiène's bedroom most nights or waits patiently throughout the

night for him to come looking for her. Tiène has been accepted into the family as if he, too, like Nicolas, were a blood relative. Uncertain of her identity or of her goals in life, let alone her ability to attract a man willing to spend his life with her, she focuses on what she does receive from Tiène, sexual gratification and the acute awareness of her female body. Yet at the same time she smothers the desire to foster a lasting relationship:

> Nous ne connaissions pas Tiène. Je ne le connaissais pas non plus. [...] c'était comme s'il m'avait forcée à ne jamais l'aimer, à ne lui plaire qu'en restant pareille toujours, à n'être personne. Bientôt il me laisserait aux Bugues avec eux, avec rien. Je me suis demandée tout à coup si son départ avait une grande importance [...] Lorsque les hommes passent devant moi sur la plage, à moitié nus, je pense au corps de Tiène. Alors je pense que je suis une femme. (*VT* 70, 128)

Complications resulting from a plot bound together by hints of incest and a love affair also help to weave the fabric of a second Duras novel, *L'Amant*. The young girl's relationship with her Chinese lover in *L'Amant* is rife with nuances of sexual exploitation and filled with attempts by the young female protagonist to establish an identity. Her relationship with the Chinese man is inseparable from the home life she experiences: the absence of a solid maternal figure and a father, utter domination and traumatic beatings from the eldest brother, and the fierce love she possesses for her younger brother. She plays several roles in the life of her younger brother: sister, mother, protector.[5]

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[5] In *La Pluie d'été* Ernesto and Jeanne are often depicted as surrogate parents to their five younger siblings. Ernesto and Jeanne offer a sense of security and acceptance to their brothers and sisters: « Ernesto et Jeanne, les brothers et les sisters les aimaient presque autant que le père et la mère, mais ceux-là ils les connaissaient infiniment et ils n'avaient d'eux aucune espèce de peur. » (74)

When analyzing sibling incest, we must also take into account the behaviour of parents, who are often characterized as being submissive, distracted, or promiscuous (Justice and Justice 104). In *La Vie tranquille* the parents are depicted as lifeless and out of touch with the world around them and their children:

> Elle [la mère] n'était ni heureuse ni malheureuse, elle ne se trouvait pas avec nous; elle était avec le temps qui passe, d'accord avec lui (*VT* 65). […] Elle est bien arrivée la mort de Jérôme, mais Nicolas aussi est mort. Clémence est partie, Noël est abandonné. Les parents sont devenus quasiment déments, finis. (*VT* 176)

Mother and father are often discussed as one entity, as if they are one and the same. They lead a meager existence and have virtually given up any hope that their children might have prosperous futures. More importantly, they have convinced themselves that Françou will not find a suitable husband: « Soudain elle [la mère] se rappelait que je n'étais pas mariée. Je savais que c'était chez maman le souci le plus constant mais elle n'en parlait jamais directement à personne » (*VT* 63-64).

In *L'Amant* the mother and the eldest brother are both actively involved in finding a potential husband for the daughter and at the same time they promote promiscuity since the girl can help financially support the family through prostitution:

> […] elle, saura peut-être un jour comment on fait venir l'argent dans cette maison. C'est pour cette raison, […] que la mère permet à son enfant de sortir dans cette tenue d'enfant prostituée. […] La mère parle, parle. Elle parle de la prostitution éclatante et elle rit […]. (*A* 33, 113)

The reader also detects evidence of the daughter being treated as a bargaining chip in *Un Barrage contre le Pacifique,* a strategy that leads in turn to the daughter's skewed view of which roles and responsibilities are being assumed by each family member. The display of proprietorship over Suzanne's choice of male companionship by her mother hampers the daughter's ability to pursue independence. It also calls into question Joseph's motives for wanting to control Suzanne's future as a wife and consequently a lover. The lines are thus blurred in the relationship established between Suzanne and her brother, and the boundaries are once again distorted when she is upset at his leaving her behind on the plain. It is not clear whether Suzanne is hurt because of fear of losing the bond with her sibling and of no longer having protection from her mother's beatings or if she is acting like a wounded lover scorned by Joseph, who has "left" her for another woman. The time spent worshipping Joseph and believing in his every word must end if she is to find her own voice and be liberated not only from his control over her (he sometimes sides with their mother regarding matters of Suzanne's future and he does occupy the position of patriarch in the family) but also from the affection she feels for him (O'Neill 56). Suzanne defies Joseph by rebelling against his opinions. She no longer values his word nor feels the power of his judgement. She vows to find a male suitor who will save her from her life of misery on the plain and uses the dress given to her by M. Jo as a tool to magnify her own sensuality as well as her sexual appeal for others:

> Elle en retira sa plus belle robe, [...] celle qu'elle avait mise quelquefois à la ville et dont Joseph disait que c'était une robe de putain. [...] Du moment qu'il avait choisi de partir et de la laisser, elle pouvait le faire. (*BCP* 320)

The Family's Influence on the Daughter

What the reader witnesses in all three of these texts is a manifestation of sexual mores first learned in the family. Suzanne is treated as an exchangeable good, while both Suzanne and Françou are pressured to find a husband. Outright prostitution is the model to follow for the young girl in *L'Amant* as she is coerced both directly and indirectly by her family to put her body on the market for male sexual gratification.

In *Un Barrage contre le Pacifique* Suzanne's mother forces her to embark upon a relationship with M. Jo, a potential suitor. Their first meeting in Ram is forced upon Suzanne by her mother, who pushes the young woman to appear pleasant and interested in M. Jo: « Pourquoi tu fais une tête d'enterrement? » dit la mère. «Tu ne peux pas avoir une fois l'air aimable? » (*BCP* 43). It is worth noting that the initial meeting between the two is dominated by M. Jo's diamond ring, symbol of his wealth. M. Jo is viewed from the outset as the means to ending the family's destitute situation. At the same time Suzanne sees M. Jo as a means of escaping the plain and her mother. Neither Suzanne nor her family considers him as a prospective life partner; he is valued solely for his ability to provide financial support or an escape route from monotony and maternal

domination. Although Suzanne ardently wishes to have both a partner and a passionate relationship, M. Jo does not fulfill either of her objectives.

The Defining Dress

Suzanne, like many of Duras's characters from her early texts, is trapped inside an unbearable situation from which she cannot escape on her own. Carmen, the manager of *l'Hôtel Central* and Joseph's former lover, persuades Suzanne to act on her need to be freed from her mother's suffocating grip. The family goes to the city with the hope of selling the diamond ring given to Suzanne by M. Jo, and during their visit they stay at Carmen's hotel. Carmen, the daughter of a former prostitute, runs the hotel like a brothel. Independent, confident, and desirable to men, Carmen attempts to help Suzanne away from her mother and teach her how to attract a man by providing her with the "tools" she needs to become desirable. On Carmen's advice, Suzanne dresses like a prostitute and roams the streets of the upper class neighbourhood in the city, desperate to lure a prospective suitor. But Carmen, the woman with the name meaning *magical song* in Latin (Ligot 82), is unsuccessful in her attempt to charm Suzanne and persuade her to be provocative and desirable for men:

> Carmen découvrit Suzanne, et pendant ce séjour-là ce fut surtout Suzanne qu'elle essaya, comme elle le disait, d' « éclairer » (*BCP* 182). […] Carmen la coiffa, l'habilla, lui donna de l'argent. Elle lui conseilla de se promener dans la ville […]. Suzanne accepta de Carmen ses robes et son argent (*BCP* 184). […] Carmen avait tort. Il n'était pas donné à tout le monde de marcher dans ces rues, sur ces trottoirs, parmi ces seigneurs et ces enfants de rois. (*BCP* 186)

The work of Joanne B. Eicher and Mary Ellen Roach-Higgins supports my analysis of the female protagonists' choice of clothing in all three Durassian texts in this chapter. Eicher and Roach-Higgins examine the link between dress and gender roles within a sociocultural framework. They believe that dress helps to establish not only an individual's gendered identity but also the expectations for social roles based on this identity: "[G]endered dress encourages each individual to internalize as gendered roles a complex set of social expectations for behavior. These roles, when linked with roles of others, represent part of social structure" (19).

Another example sees Suzanne donning the dress given to her by M. Jo and waiting at the end of the bridge, illustrating that she wants and needs to behave in a sexually overt manner by appearing attractive and available to men passing by. In *Un Barrage contre le Pacifique* and *L'Amant* both the clothing worn by the main female characters and the complete absence of clothing carry sexual overtones. For example, the dress offered to Suzanne by M. Jo is on the surface a gift bestowed by a wealthy suitor, a taste of the life Suzanne could lead if she were to marry him. Yet with Joseph's intervention, the dress takes on a new role, becoming the symbol of prostitution, of Suzanne's preparing herself to be taken advantage of by other men for a price:

> -Te voilà bien, dit Joseph à Suzanne, tu sais pas te farder, on dirait une vraie putain.
> -Elle ressemble à ce qu'elle est, dit la mère. (*BCP* 108)

Suzanne becomes aware of the power she wields and of the message rendered when wearing this dress and willingly takes advantage of it. But when she ventures out into the city dressed in Carmen's clothing, she is suddenly cognizant of the implications of being in Carmen's dress, appearing to be a mini-version of Carmen, a promiscuous woman, a second-class citizen in this city ruled by the upper class white population. From the following quote it is evident that Suzanne does not belong to the colonizing group; she is uncomfortable and has to make an effort to fit in, and her physical appearance reiterates this message. The colour of her skin is the only asset she has, but the blue flowers on her dress, like bruises on the skin, are a symbol of the suffering she and her family have endured at the bottom of the social ladder in the colony. The straw hat would blend in while working on the plain with the natives near the family bungalow, but in the white upper class neighbourhood, it only serves to label her as a peasant:

> Suzanne s'appliquait à marcher avec naturel. […] On la regardait. On se retournait, on souriait. Aucune jeune fille blanche de son âge ne marchait seule dans les rues du haut quartier. Celles qu'on rencontrait passaient en bande, en robe de sport. […] Elle se haïssait tout, haïssait tout, se fuyait, aurait voulu fuir tout, se défaire de tout. De la robe que Carmen lui avait prêtée, où de larges fleurs bleues s'étalaient, cette robe d'Hôtel Central, trop courte, trop étroite. De ce chapeau de paille, personne n'en avait un comme ça. (*BCP* 185, 187)

Like Suzanne's dress, the outfit worn by the young girl on the ferry in *L'Amant* conveys an air of eroticism: « [La] robe de soie naturelle, […] usée, presque transparente […] très décolletée » (18) is another version of the prostitute's costume. It is an invitation to be undressed, a hint of what lies underneath this flimsy sheath, an offering of a female's body for a man's

pleasure. This dress, handed down to the girl by her mother, takes on erotic connotations when worn by a young girl who boldly chooses to pair it with high heels and a man's fedora.[6] Just as we see with Carmen's choice of outfit for Suzanne in *Un Barrage contre le Pacifique,* the girl's mother presents her daughter with the opportunity to flaunt her sexuality by passing down to her a garment fit for a prostitute.

Fred Davis addresses the expression of self through a person's choice of clothing and the contradictory identity messages that are sometimes communicated through dress. Davis presents the concept of identity by applying terms such as *ambivalence* and *ambiguity*. He asserts that the ambivalence a person feels over how to express her or his social class identification, gender role, and sexuality is often reflected in the choice of clothing:

> [B]ecause clothing [...] comprises what is most closely attached to the corporeal self – it frames much of what we see when we see another – it quite naturally acquires a special capacity to, speaking somewhat loosely, "say things" about the self [...]. Dress, then, comes easily to serve as a kind of visual metaphor for identity and [...] for registering the culturally anchored ambivalences that resonate within and among identities. (25)

So we see that the girl's choice of clothing in *L'Amant* is a reflection of the relationships between the girl and her family members, as well as the colonial setting. The girl is an adolescent, still in need of care and guidance from her

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[6] Before the meeting with the Chinese lover on the ferry, the daughter is depicted as dressed in « la même chemise en coton blanc que celle de sa mère, à bretelles rapportées, faite par Dô » (*ACN* 24). From this description we can conclude that this outfit worn by both mother and daughter is unattractive and unrevealing, and is in stark contrast with the dress chosen by the girl for her voyage on the ferry. The same is true for the typical clothing worn by the mother in *L'Amant:* « ses robes lamentables, difformes, reprisées par Dô [...] » (*A* 32).

family, according to normal social standards, but the mature, seductive outfit she chooses to wear contrasts with the immaturity and innocence typically associated with adolescent behaviour. By choosing this particular outfit, the girl also transgresses expectations in the colony for young white females (Baisnée 43-44).

The portrait of the young girl on the ferry is reminiscent of Suzanne parading through the streets dressed as a prostitute as both scenes have "all the aspects of a masquerade, of a disguise both grotesque and pitiful'' (Baisnée 43) except for the fact that the adolescent in *L'Amant* is in control and confident of the message she conveys. The young female protagonist reflects on how she can transform herself into what other people want her to be, taking on the role of a chameleon who tailors her behaviour and physical appearance according to the circumstances of the social context in which she finds herself or simply satisfying the desires of those around her:

> Ce que je veux paraître je le parais, belle aussi si c'est ce que l'on veut que je sois, belle, ou jolie, jolie par exemple pour la famille, pour la famille, pas plus, tout ce que l'on veut de moi je peux le devenir. Et le croire. Croire que je suis charmante aussi bien. Dès que je le crois, que cela devienne vrai pour celui qui me voit et qui désire que je sois selon son goût, je le sais aussi. (*A* 26)

This outfit, coupled with the girl's voyage on the ferry, represents her crossing over from a state of non-desire to desire, or more specifically, being desirable to others and being in control of how she executes this new-found power. The girl has become "the subject of her own desire" (Baisnée 47). Just as the Mekong River ebbs and flows all around the ferry, carrying her towards the point of

separation from her family, her desire is in constant movement and channels through her body in a fluid motion. The girl is conscious of this awakening and fluctuation, as well as the force of desire which has the power to sweep up all in its path. Like the river, desire is not stagnant: it cascades through the body and at some point subsides. Movement not only concerns the flux of desire but also the break from the young girl's family.[7] She is making the transition from a stifling, smothering environment where her family tried to manipulate her sexual inclinations by approving only of her having sexual relations in exchange for money to meet the family's needs and the eldest son's addictions:

> Il n'y avait pas à attirer le désir. Il était dans celle qui le provoquait ou il n'existait pas. […] Autour du bac, le fleuve, […] ses eaux en marche traversent les eaux stagnantes des rizières, […] tout est emporté par la tempête profonde et vertigineuse du courant intérieur […]. Soudain je me vois comme une autre, comme une autre serait vue, au-dehors, mise à la disposition de tous, mise à la disposition de tous les regards, mise dans la circulation des villes, des routes, du désir. (*A* 28, 30-31, 20)

Re-living Trauma

In *L'Amant* Duras appears to have created a fictional narrative in which the author's lived past is foreground: « [J]e vois que tous les champs sont ouverts, qu'il n'y aurait plus de murs, que l'écrit ne saurait plus où se mettre pour se cacher » (*A*15). The brief, fragmented scenes alternate among the narrator in relation to her family, her Chinese lover and the colonial society of Sadec and

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[7] « Au moment où la photo aurait pu être prise, personne ne savait l'importance de ce passage du bac. Ça a été le déclenchement de la vie. C'est après, pour la première fois, que j'ai menti à ma mère, sur cet amour-là, c'est-à-dire, sur mon propre désir » (Duras 54). The young girl's voyage on the ferry represents her first step towards her sexual awakening which is in correlation with her emancipation from the family.

Cholen. The narrator is portrayed as daughter, sister, lover and impoverished colonist and each of these roles contributes to her representation of herself, the way in which she defines her self to herself and others.[8]

In striking contrast to the amiable relationship between sister and younger brother in *L'Amant,* we see the tyrant older brother who instills fear in his younger siblings. The girl despises her elder brother and the hatred is often so strong that she expresses her desire to kill him. Though the political confusion and war in Indochina are also reflected in everyday family life for the young girl due to her older brother's extreme violent and patriarchal ways: « Je confonds le temps de la guerre avec le règne de mon frère aîné » (78). The young woman's loathing is spawned not only by the physical and psychological abuse endured because of her brother's behaviour but is also attributable to the undeniable fact that the mother treasures her older male child despite all the grief he has caused:

> Je voulais tuer, mon frère aîné, je voulais le tuer, [...]. C'était pour enlever de devant ma mère l'objet de son amour, ce fils, la punir de l'aimer si fort, si mal, et surtout pour sauver mon petit frère, [...] de ce voile noir sur le jour, de cette loi représentée par lui, édictée par lui [...]. (*A* 13)

In *L'Amant* the narrator is remembering a traumatic childhood in an attempt to come to terms with repeated events that taint her present experiences. The

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[8] In terms of naming, it is interesting to note that the "identity" of daughters in Duras's texts generally becomes much more elusive in the latter part of her career as a writer. In the 1940s and 50s daughters are named: Maud (*Les Impudents*, 1943), Françou (*La Vie tranquille*, 1944), and Suzanne (*Un Barrage contre le Pacifique*, 1950). The name given to Lol in *Le Ravissement de Lol V. Stein* (1964), a name that has at its heart the physical mark of absence, may be seen as a significant shift toward a sort of anonymity for Durassian daughters. In the more recent texts such as *L'Amant* (1984) and *L'Amant de la Chine du Nord* (1991), the daugher's name disappears and we are simply left with *elle*, *l'enfant* or *la fille*. Coincidentally, at the time of publication of *L'Amant*, Adler asserts that Duras was regularly referring to herself in the third person (Adler 350).

narrator speaks of her mother's violent fits of anger and the perpetual fear of the elder brother killing her or their youngest sibling:

> Dans des crises ma mère se jette sur moi, elle m'enferme dans la chambre, elle me bat à coups de poing, elle me gifle, elle me déshabille [...] et elle hurle, la ville à l'entendre, que sa fille est une prostituée, qu'elle va la jeter dehors [...]. Le frère répond à la mère, il lui dit qu'elle a raison de battre l'enfant [...]. Le petit frère crie à la mère de la laisser tranquille. [...] il a peur que je sois tuée, il a peur, il a toujours peur de cet inconnu, notre frère aîné. [...] Quand ils [les deux frères] se battent on avait une peur égale de la mort pour l'un et pour l'autre [...]. (*A* 73-4)

The narrator integrates these flashbacks into the present in order to communicate and make sense of a past that is both difficult to tell or to hear, "to move away from the experience of shock by reintegrating it into a stable understanding of it" (Caruth 154). Through the fragmented nature of the text the reader bears witness to the narrator's attempt to both re-experience the harrowing events and integrate them into narrative memory,[9] making it accessible to the mind processes and allowing them to fit in with existing mental schemes. French psychologist Pierre Janet explains that creating these schemes, which function both as storage and categorization systems for the memory, is one of the main tasks of the human mind. Janet worked to produce an all-inclusive formulation on the effects of traumatic memories on consciousness, discovering that traumatic memories are often not assimilated into the mind's existing mental schemes and that in order for this to transpire the traumatized person must confront the memory frequently in

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[9] Janet makes the distinction between habit and narrative memory to underline the importance of an individual's need to integrate traumatic memories into established mental schemes. Habit memory refers to the mind's ability to absorb new information without the individual devoting much attention to what is happening. On the other hand, narrative memory requires the ability to decipher and make sense of the experience (van der Kolk and van der Hart 160).

order to overcome the trauma and allow the successful integration of the memory into existing mental schemes (van der Kolk and van der Hart 176).

The future of the young girl's relationship with the Chinese man is rendered impossible by their differences in class and race. While the Chinese lover's father condemns any conceivable plan of marriage between his son and the young white penniless prostitute, the girl identifies with her own family on issues of racism and social class since she has internalized their principles (Vickroy 1993, 22). Humiliation surfaces in both the girl and her lover due to their acknowledgement of their differences in race and financial status as they realize that "transgressions and learned patterns are intimately connected yet also clash, acting both to fuel their [affair] and defeat it" (Vickroy 1998, 130). But the young girl sometimes chooses to ignore her emotions and sexual desires surrounding the affair which further hinders any possibility of a developing relationship. She focuses on the physical side of their encounters and is emotionally absent while knowing that her Chinese lover is attempting to fully live the experience of being in love. She tells him to treat her as he would a call girl: « Elle lui dit: je préférerais que vous ne m'aimiez pas. Même si vous m'aimez je voudrais que vous fassiez comme d'habitude avec les femmes. […] Il dit qu'il est seul, atrocement seul avec cet amour qu'il a pour elle » (*A* 48).

The family's attitudes towards their daughter's prospective suitor or lover in *Un Barrage contre le Pacifique* and *L'Amant* affect the daughter's behaviour within the relationship. The young girl's family, especially her elder brother,

disapproves of her amorous connection to the Chinese man. The scene at the restaurant is indicative of the way in which she allows her family to temporarily erase or displace her feelings for her Chinese lover. She is coerced by the power of her older brother who has assumed the position of patriarch in the family. Her desire then becomes enclosed in her personal space where she cannot exhibit it (Perraudin 41): « En présence de mon frère aîné il [le Chinois] cesse d'être mon amant. Il ne cesse pas d'exister mais il ne m'est plus rien. Il devient un endroit brûlé. Mon désir obéit à mon frère aîné, il rejette mon amant » (*A* 66).

Desire is partially fuelled here by taboos, which she shatters by being with her Chinese lover. So it is that desire builds a temporary bridge between cultures and social classes (Vickroy 1993, 27). However, for the family, being in the colonizer's position allows them to mask their shame of being poor by capitalizing on their racist attitude towards the Chinese. They adopt the colonizer's attitude of racial superiority in this situation because the colour of their skin is the only advantage they have over the Chinese lover. The Chinese lover's wealth is treated almost ironically as his weakness and the family blatantly takes advantage of him. The family sees this as an opportunity to be compensated for the many years of suffering they have endured: "Their [the family's] domination and exploitation of the Chinese man is the family's one success as colonial subjects" (Vickroy 1998, 129):

> Ces soirées se passent toutes de la même façon. Mes frères dévorent et ne lui adressent jamais la parole. […] Il paye. Il compte l'argent. […] On se lève pour partir. Pas de merci, de personne. […] Mes frères ne lui adresseront jamais la parole. C'est comme s'il n'était pas visible pour eux, comme s'il n'était pas assez dense pour être perçu, vu, entendu par eux. […] Cela parce […] qu'il est posé en principe que je ne l'aime pas, que je suis avec lui pour l'argent […]. Cela parce que c'est un Chinois, que ce n'est pas un blanc. […] Nous prenons tous modèle sur le frère aîné face à cet amant. Moi non plus, devant eux, je ne lui parle pas. (*A* 64-65)

The family tries to save face when they are confronted by their poverty. The mother in particular sometimes appears to be in a state of disbelief regarding their economic situation. She refuses to be put in the same category as the peasants on the plain. Physically she appears to belong to the white colonizing French population, and in terms of citizenship she is from the *métropole*, but her class has reduced her to living on the periphery of society as do the natives. Although she is struggling in the same trenches as the indigenous population, she exploits them, attempting to assert her desired position as an authoritative figure:

> […] non, nous n'avions pas faim, nous étions des enfants blancs, nous avions honte, nous vendions nos meubles, mais nous n'avions pas faim, nous avions un boy et nous mangions, parfois, il est vrai, des saloperies, des échassiers, des petits caïmans, mais ces saloperies étaient cuites par un boy et servies par lui et parfois aussi nous les refusions, nous nous permettions ce luxe de ne pas vouloir manger. (*A* 13)

The mother believes that her daughter will one day marry a member of the colonizing group, and she is naturally furious about the girl being romantically linked to a Chinese man, fearing not only that this will tarnish her daughter's reputation but that all chances of marrying up will be lost. The daughter profits from the exclusivity of being a white citizen and is therefore accepted because of

her race, yet she is outcast due to her sexual comportment and financial standing. The mother acknowledges the family's lower class status by expecting her daughter to marry a rich white man which would allow the family to move up in the social class ranks:

> Sa fille court le plus grand danger, celui de ne jamais se marier, de ne jamais s'établir dans la société, […]. Dans des crises ma mère se jette sur moi, […] elle sent mon corps, mon linge, elle dit qu'elle trouve le parfum de l'homme chinois, […] elle hurle […] qu'elle désire le voir crever et que personne ne voudra plus d'elle, qu'elle est déshonorée […]. (*A* 73)

No matter how hard the mother fights, her struggle goes unnoticed within the grand scheme of the colonial system. Just as the waters of the Pacific Ocean regularly drown the mother's crops and her efforts to make a living off the land, the colonial system operates mercilessly to exploit the invaded country, wiping out those who attempt to succeed without any regard for the rules of the colonial system:

> [E]lle [la mère] dut se rendre à la réalité: sa concession était incultivable. Elle était annuellement envahie par la mer. […] Elle était […] vierge de toute familiarité avec les puissances du mal, désespérément ignorante du grand vampirisme colonial qui n'avait pas cessé de l'entourer. (*BCP* 25)

But why would the colonizer act in such hostile fashion towards one of his own people? The family identifies more closely with the native people because they are all considered second-class citizens. The family is often portrayed as living in harmony with the native people living on the plain. The family may be white but their social standing (due to their poverty, the daughter's sexual promiscuity and the mother's role as a single parent) places them in the lower tier of society.

Memmi comments on the exploitation and lack of solidarity in the colony that can occur between the powerful leaders and the lowly colonizer:

> Certes, tous les Européens des colonies ne sont pas des potentats, ne jouissent pas de milliers d'hectares et ne dirigent pas des administrations. Beaucoup sont eux-mêmes victimes des maîtres de la colonisation. Ils en sont économiquement exploités, politiquement utilisés, en vue de défendre des intérêts qui ne coïncident pas souvent avec les leurs. (36)

There are other indications supporting this theory of a similarity between the family and the indigenous people, a cross-cultural contamination. Her daughter, whom she is hoping to marry off to a respectable and affluent white man, is not only mixing with the colonized group by having an affair with a Chinese man, but her physical appearance is compared to that of an indigenous woman's body. The narrator comments on how she and her Chinese lover have this aspect of their backgrounds in common, of growing up in the intolerable heat of a tropical climate. The physical descriptions of their bodies are also comparable, focusing on the frailty of their bodies and the incredible softness of their skin:

> [Description du Chinois:] La peau est d'une somptueuse douceur. Le corps. Le corps est maigre, sans force, sans muscles, il pourrait avoir été malade, […] il est très faible […] (*A* 49). [Description de la fille :] Depuis qu'il était fou de son corps, la petite fille ne souffrait plus de l'avoir, de sa minceur et, de même, étrangement, sa mère ne s'en inquiétait plus comme elle faisait avant, […]. Qu'elle a […] cette peau, cette peau de tout le corps qui vient de l'eau de la pluie qu'on garde ici pour le bain des femmes, des enfants. Il dit que les femmes de France, à côté de celles-ci, ont la peau du corps dure, presque rêche. (*A* 120)

Although the mother may despise any thoughts of her family being compared to the indigenous people, she cannot control the effects of this

country's climate on her daughter's corporal growth away from her native Caucasian roots. It is as if the colonized country is taking root inside the family after many years of cohabitation; the family and Indochina cannot coexist without one affecting the other:

> Lui, l'amant de Cholen, il croit que la croissance de la petite blanche a pâti la chaleur trop forte. Lui aussi il est né et il a grandi dans cette chaleur. Il se découvre avoir avec elle cette parenté-là. Il dit que toutes ces années passées ici, à cette intolérable latitude, ont fait qu'elle est devenue une jeune fille de ce pays de l'Indochine. Qu'elle a la finesse de leurs poignets, leurs cheveux drus dont on dirait qu'ils ont pris pour eux toute la force [...]. (*A* 120)

Joseph is the hybrid of the younger and older brother presented in *L'Amant.* Although he shares a close relationship with Suzanne, he also contributes to the control of her future by sometimes siding with their mother on the topic of finding a suitable husband. After the father's death, Joseph assumes the role of the patriarch in the family. He is a strong male figure in the household, and both the mother and Suzanne listen when Joseph speaks. Indeed Joseph's attachment to and open greediness over the family phonograph, *La Voix de son Maître*, which was once owned by his father, is a symbol of his assumption of the position of patriarchal power and speech:

> Joseph has appropriated the role of the father in the family. When their father died, Joseph took for himself the phonograph, his father's last purchase, and now guards it jealously [...]. The phonograph clearly represents the phallus, and thus language (la Voix de son Maître). (O'Neill 55)

Both Joseph and Suzanne dream of escaping their life of poverty on the plain and their mother's iron grip on her children. For both characters escape will

come in the form of a lover willing to whisk them away. Ironically, both children flee to the cinema and find comfort in the world they inhabit while there. Watching love stories unfold on the big screen in the darkness of the movie theatre allows both Suzanne and Joseph to imagine their own respective love affairs in real life. The cinema represents the imaginary but at the same time, is linked to the real (Bardet 58). After seeing the fictional lovers in the films, Suzanne believes that a passionate love affair and a consequential separation from her mother are attainable:

> Avant de faire l'amour vraiment, on le fait d'abord au cinéma, […]. Le grand mérite du cinéma c'était d'en donner envie aux filles et aux garçons et de les rendre impatients de fuir leur famille. (*BCP* 199)

Joseph ultimately succeeds in realizing his dream when he meets Lina at the cinema. For Joseph the cinema is a refuge [*l'oasis]* from life on the plain; in Suzanne's case, inside the movie house she can dodge the glares of the upper class population on the city streets. The cinema does not discriminate against poverty and its darkness masks Joseph's and Suzanne's association with wretchedness and destitution [*la grande nuit égalitaire du cinéma]*. The world of the cinema allows them to forget, to live in another world, to be distracted from their sad existence on the plain. They are engulfed by the love stories they see writ large on the big screen, wishing that they too could reside in this fictional world. Suzanne sees her own desire for a passionate love affair projected on the movie screen [*tant d'embrassements définitifs]*, thus fueling her determination to break free from her mother's grasp and create a life of her own:

> Le piano commença à jouer. La lumière s'éteignit. Suzanne se sentit désormais invisible, invincible et se mit à pleurer de bonheur. C'était l'oasis, [...] la nuit artificielle et démocratique, la grande nuit égalitaire du cinéma [...]. Déjà, à force de voir tant de films, tant de gens s'aimer, tant de départs, tant d'enlacements, tant d'embrassements définitifs, [...] déjà ce que Suzanne aurait voulu c'était de quitter la mère. (*BCP* 188, 203)

It is interesting to note here that for their mother, the cinema has no such link to a possible escape from a society ruled by a privileged class. On the contrary, she had played piano at *L'Eden Cinéma* after her husband's death when she had needed to support her family. With her two children sleeping on blankets on either side of the piano, she focused on providing music to accompany the films and was thus unable to watch and therefore be charmed by or lose herself in the scenes representing fictitious lives. But like her children, the mother fantasized about the utopian world represented by the cinema. One time she even went as far as risking her job as piano player to sneak into the cinema and watch a film, but she was caught and consequentially was never able to access the pleasure brought by the cinema. The mother was in love with a fellow employee at the cinema but a relationship never came to fruition, as the reality of her situation, being a poor single mother in the colony, allowed no time for pleasure:

> [E]lle [la mère] avait été très amoureuse d'un employé de l'Eden pendant deux ans, c'était elle qui le lui avait dit, et qu'elle n'avait jamais couché avec lui une seule fois toujours à cause d'eux [ses enfants]. [...] En dix ans la mère n'avait pas pu voir un seul film. [...] Pendant dix ans elle avait eu envie d'aller au cinéma et elle n'avait pu y aller qu'une seule fois en se cachant. (*BCP* 282-3)

The feeling of entrapment, of being confined to a life of ennui and oppression is expressed in one form or another by many members of the

Durassian family. The family may have a different configuration from one text to the next, but the essential thread remains the same: there is no room for individual growth or discovery. Like Suzanne in *Un Barrage contre le Pacifique,* Françou in *La Vie tranquille* is the only daughter in the family and she too follows a set of expectations that demand she possess all of the qualities supposedly sought after by a potential husband:

> Je m'aperçois que je ne suis morte de rien. C'est pourquoi sans doute ma vie est ce marécage où je ne me souviens pas, en m'agitant, d'avoir produit autre chose que toujours le même clapotement d'ennui. […] Toujours été raisonnable, sage, vierge jusqu'à vingt-cinq ans. Il fallait accueillir les hommes qui venaient avec leur sourire qui insiste ou simplement leurs beaux bras. (*VT* 171, 131)

Françou suffers from emotional neglect and from not being the preferred child in the family. Françou's parents turned a blind eye to the murder of Jérôme for they saw it as a stepping stone to a more prosperous and worry-free future for their son Nicolas:

> Il [Nicolas] avait le droit absolu de faire ce qu'il avait fait. Mais en le protégeant contre la justice, nous nous conduisions comme si c'était nous qui lui donnions ce droit. Nous en gâtions la pureté et du même coup tout le plaisir de Nicolas. Pour lui plaire, il aurait fallu être imprudents. (*VT* 22)

The mother and father in this particular novel are usually presented as a single unit: the parents. They are seldom discussed in isolation and exist only in the background and are not an integral element of the plot (Van de Biezenbos 50).

Françou's trip to the seaside provokes self-reflection and a questioning of her ties to the family. The time she spends alone allows her to contemplate the identity she has formed in her attachment to her family, while at the same time

she tries to differentiate from that identity and create a new, self-made image of herself. According to Lacan, the mirror stage has a crucial function in the formation of the *I*. As the child passes through the mirror stage, confusion between the image and the subject creates a tension or a crisis of identity (Lacan 4-5). In Duras's text, we witness a physical manifestation of the mirror stage as Françou struggles to identify with her image in the looking glass:

> Je crois que c'est le deuxième soir que c'est arrivé. [...] J'étais couchée lorsque je me suis aperçue couchée dans l'armoire à glace ; je me suis regardée. Le visage que je voyais souriait d'une façon à la fois engageante et timide. [...] Je ne me suis pas reconnue. [...] j'ai eu l'impression que la glace contenait toujours dans son épaisseur je ne sais quel personnage, à la fois fraternel et haineux, qui contestait en silence mon identité. Je n'ai plus su ce qui se rapportait le plus à moi, ce personnage ou bien mon corps couché, là, bien connu. Qui étais-je, qui avais-je pris pour moi jusque-là ? [...] Je n'arrivais pas à me loger dans l'image que je venais de surprendre. Je flottais autour d'elle, très près, mais il existait entre nous comme une impossibilité de nous rassembler. (*VT* 122-23)

The Missing Father

It is not only the sexual culture of the family and the passiveness on the part of the parents that helps us to determine why incest may occur between siblings. The physical absence of the father is also a factor to consider when discussing incest and sexual comportment of both sons and daughters (Justice and Justice 104). Although the father is usually absent in Duras's texts, this is not the case in *La Vie tranquille*.[10] Lia Van de Biezenbos suggests in *Fantasmes*

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[10] The story of father and daughter is at the heart of *L'après-midi de Monsieur Andesmas*. Like Françou's father in *La Vie tranquille*, Valérie's father is also depicted as powerless and weak. Monsieur Andesmas is old and fragile, waiting for death, and is unable to stop the impending separation between himself and his daughter Valérie, brought on not only by the reality of his mortality but also by Valérie's love affair with Michel Arc: « M. Andesmas habite ce village

maternels dans l'oeuvre de Marguerite Duras that the continual absence of the father in Durassian texts is significant in that it « pourrait être le signe de l'impossibilité d'accepter la loi symbolique du père [...] » (46). According to Lacan, when the child moves from the Imaginary to the Symbolic, he or she is able to see himself or herself as 'other' in relation to the mother. In other words, the child recognizes himself or herself as *I*. Access to language in the Symbolic Order or the Law-of-the-Father, comes at a price: repression of and separation from the mother (Giorgio 14-15). For a girl, her gender prevents her from fully identifying with her father. Females are trapped and repressed within the realm of the father, "[f]emininity is squelched, silenced, and straightjacketed because the only words that women are given are masculine words" (Tong 221).

The father in *La Vie tranquille* is nameless and his identity as a provider for and guardian of the family is also erased as his social status crumbles. Françou's father had been working as a government official in a small Belgium town for more than ten years when he was caught stealing money from the town's funds in order to pay off debts incurred from a scheme involving Jérôme. Françou then watched as her father was reduced to nothingness during his farewell party at their home. For Françou, the real moment of defeat took place the day after the gathering at the family home. After ignoring his daughter for years in order to fulfill his professional responsibilities, he took her in his arms, hoping to make up

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depuis un an, depuis qu'il a atteint cet âge suffisamment avancé pour se faire une raison de cesser tout travail et d'attendre, dans l'oisiveté, la mort (15). [...] M. Andesmas essaie tout ce temps [...] d'affronter le souvenir de Valérie qui est là, en bas, sur le rectangle blanc de la place et qui l'a oublié » (38).

for his past absence. Reflecting on this event, Françou admits that it was too late for her father to recapture lost moments with his daughter. The love and attention she needed all along from her father would never materialize because he could never compensate for neglecting her. Thus the idea of her father's love will always be a fantasy for Françou (van de Biezenbos 49-50):

> Je suis allée vers papa. Je me suis arrêtée devant lui. Il m'a regardée longuement sans faire un seul geste. […] Papa me regardait avec curiosité. […] Il était devenu en une soirée un bourgmestre déchu, plus que déshonoré, qui ne ferait plus de discours dans le salon de la mairie, qui ne porterait plus l'écharpe de sa ville, […]. Cette petite fille lui restait encore comme lui restaient ses bras, des années à vivre. Mais ses fonctions de bourgmestre l'avaient sans doute empêché de bien la voir jusque-là et il a dû s'en souvenir tout à coup. (*VT* 39)

In summary, the family drama is at the heart of Duras's early literary works *(Les Impudents, La Vie tranquille, Un Barrage contre le Pacifique)* but re-surfaces in her later texts (*L'Amant, L'Amant de la Chine du Nord)* as well. It is through the family that the meaning of the social is communicated to the child. Durassian children are looking for a way to escape their present situation and ultimately the power to detach themselves from the family. In Duras, leaving the family is marked by the process of discovery; for example, *La Vie tranquille* is structured as a daughter's reflection on her confinement within the family and a quest for the self. Two violent deaths in the family are seen as the catalyst for action and change on the part of the daughter in this text. Violence brings to light the air of indifference that surrounds the family and leads the daughter to explore separation from her family: « face au non-savoir de ce qui l'attend, Françou

possède un réconfort ; elle peut affronter l'inconnu forte de la certitude que c'est de son propre gré qu'elle s'est séparée du monde familier » (Carruggi 127).

The absence of the father in all four texts examined here should not be viewed as the lone cause of the often dysfunctional family in Duras. It is important to consider the way in which the mother adapts to her situation as a single parent and the effect of her resulting behaviour on the mother-child bond (Kendall 4). And it is to this mother-child relationship that we now turn.

Chapter Two: Rewriting the Story of Mother and Child

> The first knowledge any woman has of warmth, nourishment, tenderness, security, sensuality, mutuality, comes from her mother. That earliest enwrapment of one female body with another can sooner or later be denied or rejected, felt as choking possessiveness, as rejection, trap, or taboo [...] (218).
>
> -Adrienne Rich

The focus of this chapter is the analysis of the relationship between the mother and child in *Un Barrage contre le Pacifique, Des Journées entières dans les arbres, L'Amant* and *L'Amant de la Chine du Nord.* My previous chapter examined the re-presentation of the Durassian family as a whole and the constraints that society has imposed on it. These restrictions are reflected differently within the individual relationships between family members. Children must confront both parental power and sexuality in order to gain independence. The intersection of the social with the sexual in the Durassian family creates a series of boundaries that family members either obey or transcend. My intent in this chapter is to zero in on the mother-child dyad since the maternal figure plays an integral role in the child's formation of self. My analysis shows an evolution in the daughter's successive attempts to come to terms with an overbearing mother who "hold[s] back the daughter's process of individuation, [...] act[s] as regulator of her sexuality, and generally [...] hinder[s] her emancipation and autonomy" (Giorgio 5). By looking at the way the daughter seeks to escape the

maternal sphere and the difficulties of extricating herself from the mother for good, I indicate crucial shifts in the view of self and other in relation to the daughter. Three of the four texts analyzed in this chapter reveal an effort to make sense of the daughter's feelings towards her mother and to sort through a relationship marked by conflict. Dealing with this tumultuous relationship is necessary since for any daughter, identity is grounded in the bond with her mother.

One of the complexities to be taken into account is the contradictory aspect of the relationship between the two women. Duras paints a portrait of a love-hate relationship between mother and daughter. From the earliest text examined in this chapter, *Un Barrage contre le Pacifique* (1950), the reader is presented with an array of emotions, from adoration and attachment on one hand, to outright hostility and repulsion on the other. The unconditional love between mother and child is in conflict with the absolute reign of the mother over her children, the sexual blossoming of her daughter and her daughter's desire to be autonomous. For example, in *L'Amant,* attempts to free oneself from the mother's grip come in the form of acting on sexual desire and focusing on the desire to write.

Numerous critical texts have been devoted to the concept of motherhood, some focusing on the relationship between mother and child, others more specifically tailored to examine the bond between mother and daughter. Nancy Chodorow's *The Reproduction of Mothering* concentrates on the way in which

society produces mothers and the effects of social structures on a mother's psychological processes. This text is helpful in considering the influence of the mother's social setting, or more specifically, the colonial backdrop in Duras, on the mother's behaviour. The political, social, economic, and cultural processes that are at play in Duras's texts must be included in an analysis of the psychic structures of the mother-daughter configuration. In *Daughtering and Mothering: Female Subjectivity Reanalysed*, a variety of academic critics investigate several theories that shroud the mother-daughter bond. For example, Karin Flaake's essay calls into question the importance of the female body in the mother-daughter relation and also examines the mother's role in the sexual development of the daughter. By incorporating Flaake's point of view, I consider the significance of the outfit worn by the young girl in *L'Amant* and *L'Amant de la Chine du Nord* and the way in which clothing enhances the development of the girl's autonomy, sexuality and a space for female desire. In keeping with the crucial themes of the impotent mother in society and the way in which women develop an identity outside of maternity, I use Adrienne Rich's *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution* in order to investigate motherhood as a patriarchal institution that allows men to have control over women's power of reproduction. Rich argues that "it [the institution of motherhood] has alienated women from our bodies by incarcerating us in them" (13).

Ruth de Kanter emphasizes the necessity of considering the mother-daughter relationship in its social context. In order to create a healthy, sustainable

bond and to continue to grow as independent individuals, mothers and daughters must be women in their own particular social context. Daughters need to see their mothers play different roles in society, whether it be as a wife, sister, worker, etc (Schreurs 5). A daughter looks to her mother to shape her femininity and to develop her sense of self. The Durassian mother, who is powerless in a patriarchal society, sends out contradictory signals to the daughter in that she occupies a subordinate position in society but plays a powerful role in the life of her daughter. The daughter's understanding of this contrast constitutes a major part of the way in which the daughter perceives her own place in the world (Corbin 4). A close psychoanalytical analysis of the process of separation between mother and daughter may perhaps explain why Duras's characters are torn between their love for each other and their need to separate. Placing their relationship in the colonial context adds further complexity since the psychoanalytical consequences of living in a colonial setting (violence, madness, depression, etc.) are at the heart of the Durassian mother-daughter relationship. The mother figure presented in these Durassian texts often plays a subordinate role in the French colonial system, which significantly contributes to her mental instability.

The Pre-Oedipal Experience

The twentieth century gave rise to a number of female psychoanalysts and theorists with an interest in investigating the mother-child bond during the pre-Oedipal phase. When studies done by Sigmund Freud failed to produce

information on the effect of early mother-child contact on a person's mental growth, female psychoanalysts such as Melanie Klein (*Love, Guilt and Reparation* [1975] and *The Psycho-Analysis of Children* [1975]) and Helene Deutsch (*The Psychology of Woman: A Psychoanalytical Interpretation* [1944-45]) filled this gap by utilizing their knowledge and experience of different mother-daughter relationships (Giorgio 19). Several women psychoanalysts have since followed in their footsteps, making the investigation of the enduring influence of the maternal bond on female psychic development a mainstay of their work.[1]

Nancy Chodorow's work (1978) on mothering builds upon some of the constructs laid by pioneering women in the field of mothering and psychoanalysis. Chodorow defines psychoanalysis as the study of the connection between mental processes and behaviour. She accentuates the absence of a direct correlation between a particular unconscious mental process and the way a behavior is carried out. An unconscious affect may manifest itself in countless different forms of behaviour (Chodorow 41). Chodorow relies on object-relations theory to explain her psychoanalytical point of view on the way in which society reproduces mothers. She uses this theoretical approach to explain how sexuality is formed and expressed with respect to the role of drives. The psychic structure is

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[11] The inspiration for Melanie Klein's work on mother-child relationships and psychic development came from her personal experiences as a mother. Klein is attributed with establishing the psychological school of object-relations in England. Klein's theory on the mother-child bond is regarded as highly useful because its relevancy extends beyond the stages of child infancy, allowing literary critics to apply it to texts where mother-child interactions in adulthood are evident. Klein's work has influenced contemporary theorists: for example, Julia Kristeva's theory on the mother as the abject (Giorgio 19-20).

comprised of three sections: id, ego and superego. Object-relations theory comes into play in ego psychology, which demands an understanding of Freud's drive theory. Drive theory is centered around the belief that psychic development derives from inborn libidinal urges which seek out gratification. Although object-relations theorists do consider physiology to play a part in development, they differentiate themselves from instinctual theorists on the belief that a child's mental development stems from her/his social relational background:

> All aspects of psychic structure, character, and emotional and erotic life are social, constituted through a history of object-choices. This history, dependent on the individual personalities and behavior of those who happen to interact with a child, is also socially patterned according to the family structure and prevalent psychological modes of a society. (Chodorow 50)

Entering the social, patriarchal system represents access to language. In order to be a part of this system and consequently to gain access to language, a rupture must occur between mother and child so that he or she can cross the threshold to symbolic order, otherwise known as the father's domain. The imaginary is characterized by a baby's inability to distinguish between "myself" and "other". Once the child moves from the imaginary to the symbolic, she or he is capable of distinguishing her or himself from the mother (Giorgio 14).

Separation from the mother is presented with several obstacles from the very early years of the child's life. Since the mother is usually the main caretaker of an infant, the child depends on the mother for nurturing and nourishment. For the child, self-definition primarily depends on the relation to the mother. William Ronald D. Fairbairn posits that since infants are not yet capable of comprehending

their mother as separate, they will resist any separation from the mother. Fairbairn calls this early phase "infantile dependence" and believes that it is crucial to the development of the person (Fairbairn 39, 120, 145).

Breaking the Fusional Bond

With regard to the mother-child bond, autonomy and development are often defined in terms of how one grows away from the mother and finds the self. Aggression on the part of the mother and/or daughter can be seen as a consequence of the daughter's gaining subjectivity. When betrayal or lack of care on the part of the mother is sensed by the daughter, sorrow, resentment and anger are highlighted. The young girl in each of the texts examined in this chapter recognizes the mother's loyalty towards and love for the elder son which is contrasted with the mother's frequent outbursts of rage and her "abandonment" of her two other children when she slips into the depths of depression and madness. In both *L'Amant* and *L'Amant de la Chine du Nord,* the eldest son is the source of fear for his younger brother and the source of hatred for his sister, the daughter of the family. He repeatedly physically abuses her younger brother and he encourages the mother when she beats the daughter. The girl knows her mother is capable of loving a child as she witnesses the favoritism shown towards her older brother. Yet this partiality to the male child who exhibits dominance and evokes terror shows that the mother chooses to identify with a show of masculine qualities, thus reinforcing patriarchal views and reducing her daughter's

femaleness to a state of insignificance. The presence of the son is detected in some of the violent scenes involving mother and daughter in *Un barrage contre le Pacifique* and *L'Amant.* This highlights the mother's desire to merge with the all-powerful masculine stance, which in turn negates female subjectivity (Günther 2002, 88-9):

> Dans des crises ma mère se jette sur moi, [...] elle me bat [...]. Derrière les murs de la chambre fermée, le frère. Le frère répond à la mère, il lui dit qu'elle a raison de battre l'enfant [...]. Je sais que le frère aîné est rivé à la porte, il écoute, il sait ce que fait ma mère, il sait que la petite est nue, et frappée, il voudrait que ça dure encore et encore jusqu'au danger. Ma mère n'ignore pas ce dessein de mon frère aîné, obsur, terrifiant. (*A* 73-4)

The favoritism expressed by the mother instills a rage in the daughter that in part contributes to her thoughts of killing the object of her mother's affection: « Je voulais tuer, mon frère aîné, je voulais le tuer [...]. C'était pour enlever de devant ma mère l'objet de son amour, ce fils, la punir de l'aimer si fort [...] » (*A* 13). The daughter and her younger brother are not only victims of abuse from their older brother, they also suffer because the mother loves the elder brother so fiercely. She does not protect her two younger children from the senseless punishments inflicted by their sibling because she cannot see past her love for him (Corbin 86). The daughter may lash out at the mother who is threatening to engulf her. This aggression can stem either from the daughter's fantasy of continual nurturing and protection from the mother or from the mother's incapability to perpetuate a feminine identity other than a maternal one, "the ambivalent female image: the power of the mother as opposed to the powerless of the 'woman' in the mother"

(de Kanter 33). The outside world influences the bond between the mother and daughter, ideally allowing the mother to carve out a place for herself other than the maternal role alone (de Kanter 30).

This impact of the social context on the mother-child relationship leads de Kanter to believe that the mother-child relationship cannot be viewed as simply a binary relation. However, what we witness in the Duras texts studied here is that the mother seems unable to maintain a female identity that is not primarily associated with maternity. The mother's satisfaction is neglected or the daughter's mental growth is hindered. In other words, neither the mother nor the daughter will be completely content. This is evident as early as the publication of *Un Barrage contre le Pacifique.* "The impression given is that instead of representing a self to others, she [the mother] represents nothing" (Corbin 99). The mother is at the mercy of the oppressive French colonial system and is left in financial ruin. The novel repeatedly illustrates the mother's unrealized ambitions to cultivate the land purchased from the corrupt French colonial administration. She is a victim of colonial authority and therefore has no voice nor integral role to play in society. In the eyes of this patriarchal world, she has no value or authority and is therefore excluded from discourse. She is not capable of taking charge of her own life and so she meddles in the lives of her children. But her daughter refuses to be molded according to her mother's wishes. In *L'Amant,* the mother expresses a strong dislike about her daughter's idea of becoming a writer:

> Je veux écrire. Déjà je l'ai dit à ma mère: ce que je veux c'est ça, écrire. Pas de réponse la première fois. Et puis elle demande: écrire quoi? Je dis des livres, des romans. Elle dit durement: après l'agrégation de mathématiques tu écriras si tu veux, ça ne me regardera pas. Elle est contre, ce n'est pas méritant, ce n'est pas du travail, c'est une blague [...]. (*A* 29)

The text itself is proof of the daughter's defiance in the face of her mother. Instead of finding herself crippled like her mother, the daughter chooses to follow her creative intentions. In short, the mother's misery is seen as an outlet for the daughter's creativity (Giorgio 12). The daughter in *L'Amant de la Chine du Nord* talks about one day writing the story of her mother's life: « Raconter cette histoire c'est pour moi plus tard l'écrire. Je ne peux pas m'empêcher. Une fois j'écrirai ça: la vie de ma mère » *(ACN* 101). Out of all the hardship and negativity generated by the mother's state of powerlessness, instability and depression, the creation of these novels can be viewed as an attempt to construct the self, separate from the mother.[2] The narrator's mother is crucial to the texts' production because the mother's presence is often detected when the past is open for discussion. In *L'Amant de la Chine du Nord* the mother does not openly oppose her daughter's wish to be a writer; but she does question her daughter about her plans for writing: « Tu écriras sur quoi quand tu feras des livres? » (25). This is a signal that a new level of understanding is developing between mother and daughter.

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[2] Signs of the mother's despair can be found in the opening pages of *Un Barrage contre le Pacifique*. The family's purchase of an old, sick horse proves to be a waste of scarce money because « il [le cheval] était comme elle [la mère], qu'il en avait assez de vivre et qu'il préférait se laisser crever » (*BCP* 16). In *L'Amant de la Chine du Nord* we find definitive, striking statements which make reference to the mother's state of hopelessness and depression : « C'est une mère découragée » (*ACN* 15) and « La mère, toujours sans pleurs aucun. Morte de vivre » (*ACN* 27).

The Mother Who Knows No Boundaries

Luce Irigaray's text *Et l'une ne bouge pas sans l'autre* recounts a daughter's struggle to create her own identity. Irigaray signals to her reader that recognition of both autonomy and the fusional bond between mother and daughter creates ambivalence in their relationship. The mother's voice is absent in the text, allowing the daughter to stress her need and desire to be close to her mother but at the same time to develop her own sense of self:

> J'ai une maison dedans, une maison dehors, et je me porte de l'une à l'autre, de l'autre dans l'une. Et je n'ai plus besoin de ton ventre, de tes bras, de tes yeux ni de tes mots pour rentrer ou sortir. Je suis tout près de toi encore, et déjà si loin. C'est le matin, mon premier matin. Bonjour. Tu es là, je suis ici. Entre nous, tant d'air, de lumière, d'espace à nous partager. Je ne trépigne plus. (Irigaray 1979, 9)

As we see in Duras's young female character, the portrayal of a mother who dominates but is also frigid towards or sometimes emotionally absent from her daughter is reminiscent of the maternal character in many of Duras's texts: « Avec ton lait, ma mère, j'ai bu la glace. […] Tu as coulé en moi, et ce liquide chaud est devenu poison qui me paralyse » (Irigaray 1979, 7).

In the case of Duras's writing, the young woman does not want to be a victim of a patriarchal society and fears being trapped in a downward spiral towards depression and madness, so she must re-evaluate her relationship with her mother. Crossing the Mekong River in *L'Amant* and *L'Amant de la Chine du Nord* becomes a symbolic voyage towards the possibility of freedom. This passage represents the impending change in the young girl's life. On one side, she

is threatened by her suffocating mother and a family that surrounds her with despair. On the other, the promise of independence. But the passage from desperation and discouragement to personal liberation will not be without challenges. In her presentation of the young girl on the ferry, Duras alludes to the difficulties that the protagonist must face in order to win her autonomy. The reader often finds references to water (rivers or the sea) in Durassian texts; in this particular example, the Mekong River is associated with danger and the capability to swallow anything in its path:

> Dans le courant terrible je regarde le dernier moment de ma vie [la fille]. Le courant est si fort, il emporterait tout, aussi bien des pierres, une cathédrale, une ville. Il y a une tempête qui souffle à l'intérieur des eaux du fleuve. Du vent qui se débat. (*A* 18)

The powerless mother cannot be a model for a daughter who is looking to find her place in the world. In order to enter the world on her own terms and to have access to her own distinct voice and opinion, the daughter must "kill" the mother in order to escape the mother's hold over her. Since the mother cannot act as mediator between society and her daughter or provide an example of how to maintain a valued female identity, the daughter is forced to save herself from her mother's influence (Giorgio 12):

> A mother's victimization does not merely humiliate her [the daughter], it mutilates the daughter who watches her for clues as to what it means to be a woman. Like the traditional foot-bound Chinese woman, she passes on her own affliction. The mother's self-hatred and low expectations are the binding-rags for the psyche of the daughter. (Rich 243)

The daughter realizes that being the same gender as her mother, they both belong to a "group" labeled as minority or second-rate in a patriarchal society (Corbin 118). And in many Durassian texts, the mother herself supports the sexist attitudes of society by treating her daughter as a mere commodity to be exchanged for goods and money. The Durassian daughter, therefore, has a double hurdle to overcome: "Through the exploration of the mother's subjectivity and subjection, the daughter confronts the double betrayal inherent in the mother-daughter relation" (Corbin 120). The daughter attempts to reject the maternal model of a woman who embodies patriarchal values by asserting them and at the same time being oppressed by them:

> -[Le Chinois à la fille] C'est vrai que vous n'avez plus rien. La seule chose qui leur restait à vendre c'était toi. […] Ton frère aîné avait écrit à mon père. Ta mère cherchait à me rencontrer (*ACN* 151). […] Elle [la fille] est seule avec l'argent, elle est émue par elle-même devant l'argent qu'elle a réussi à prendre au-dehors. Avec la mère elles ont fait ça : elles ont pris : l'argent. (*ACN* 179)

Adrienne Rich talks of matrophobia, or the daughter's experience of a conflicting attraction and hatred toward the mother. The daughter is frightened of possessing the same characteristics as her mother so she must make the decision to separate herself from the maternal figure. Rich sees that "our personalities seem dangerously to blur and overlap with our mothers'; and in a desperate attempt to know where mother ends and daughter begins, we perform radical surgery" (236). Irigaray also expresses the sense of "oneness" with the mother and the confusion of identities as experienced by the daughter. She uses imagery relating to nourishment to describe how the mother can "stuff" her daughter with

her own attitudes in an attempt to keep her child close. The daughter recognizes a certain reliance on her mother for guidance. But she also conveys her desire to be able to feel separate from the mother and to view her mother's position in society as she metamorphoses into her own being with a distinct identity:

> Le jour se lève. J'ai faim. J'ai envie d'avoir des forces pour marcher. Pour courir toute seule près ou loin de toi. Pour aller vers ce que j'aime [my emphasis]. […] Tu as préparé à manger. Tu m'apportes à manger. Tu me/te donnes à manger. Mais tu me/te donnes trop, comme si tu voulais me remplir tout entière avec ce que tu m'apportes. Tu te mets dans ma bouche, et j'étouffe. Mets-toi moins en moi, et laisse-moi te regarder. J'aimerais te voir pendant que tu me nourris. (Irigaray 1979, 9)

Lessons on How to Attract and Choose a Lover

In *Un Barrage contre le Pacifique* it seems as though Suzanne's destiny will be determined by her mother with the help of her brother Joseph. The relationships with suitors approved by her mother are marked by Suzanne's complete passivity. M. Jo's wealth spawns interest in her mother and the same is true for the encounter with Barner. Suzanne becomes an object of exchange for M. Jo; if she allows him to see her naked in the bungalow, he will shower her with gifts. Her mother also profits from this exchange in that she will benefit financially from the relationship between her daughter and M. Jo:

> La rencontre de M. Jo fut d'une importance déterminante pour chacun d'eux. […] dès qu'il fut évident qu'il reviendrait régulièrement au bungalow, la mère lui fit entendre qu'elle attendait sa demande en mariage. […] M. Jo demanda à Suzanne de lui ouvrir la porte de la cabine de bains afin qu'il puisse la voir toute nue, moyennant quoi il lui promit le dernier modèle de LA VOIX DE SON MAÎTRE
> et des disques en plus […] C'est ainsi qu'au moment où elle allait ouvrir et se donner à voir au monde, le monde la prostitua. (*BCP* 67, 72-73)

Her mother sees Suzanne's possible future marriage to M. Jo as the family's ticket to a prosperous life. Managing the outcome of her daughter's life will in turn be the answer to her own precarious position as a woman in this colonial society. The mother even reasons that her own continuing ruination is a result of her daughter's lack of action in finding a fit husband who can provide for the rest of the family:

> C'était la mère qui lui demandait de lui poser tous les jours la question. Elle était pressée. Une fois Suzanne mariée, M. Jo lui donnerait de quoi reconstruire ses barrages, [...] terminer le bungalow, changer la toiture, acheter une autre auto, faire arranger les dents de Joseph. Maintenant elle trouvait que Suzanne était responsable du retard apporté à ses projets. Ce mariage était nécessaire, disait-elle. Il était même leur seule chance de sortir de la plaine. (*BCP* 124)

The mother in *L'Amant* and *L'Amant de la Chine du Nord* also tries to treat her daughter as a commodity to be sold to the richest male suitor. But the daughter in these texts plays a more active role in the impending separation between mother and daughter and one manifestation of this occurs in the young woman's choice of clothing. On the ferry she is wearing a tattered, almost transparent silk dress passed on from her mother. She is also sporting a man's hat, bought for her by her mother from a bargain bin. The link to her mother is explicit in this outfit, being that the mother is the source of both articles of clothing. According to Chodorow, both the external and internal relation to the mother continue to play an integral part in personality formation far beyond the preoedipal period. Chodorow claims that girls have a tendency to continue to identify with the preoedipal experience of fusion with the mother. Daughters and

mothers share the link to gender and consequently identify more closely with their mothers than sons do. However, self-definition and independence do begin to take precedence as "the ease of this identification and the feeling of continuity with her mother conflict with a girl's preoedipally-toned relationship" (Chodorow 136).

The difference between the mother's and daughter's affiliation with the dress is that the daughter sends a bold, provocative message with sexual overtones in choosing to wear the outfit as she does. It is in this outfit that she first attracts the attention of her Chinese lover. The girl asserts that her mother is ignorant when it comes to sexual pleasure, stating in *L'Amant* that « la mère n'a pas connu la jouissance » (50). A mother's inability to explore sexual pleasure can cause mothers unconsciously to harbour jealousy towards their daughter's ability to access sexual desire. A daughter's growth can also give rise to a mother's reflection on her own situation in the grander scheme such as her own value as a woman in society (Flaake 9). Indeed in *L'Amant de la Chine du Nord* the absence of the mother's sexual desire is discussed in a conversation between mother and daughter. The mother uses the discussion to urge her daughter to seek out her own identity and to overlook her mother's desires, orders and advice. Here we are presented with a sign that the mother is becoming more open to achieving mutuality or a closeness with her daughter that is not overwhelming or suffocating:

> C'est ici que la mère dit à son enfant ce qui les sépare, ce qui les a toujours séparées.
> -Je ne t'ai jamais dit…mais il faut que tu saches […] j'étais trop sérieuse, je l'ai été trop longtemps…c'est comme ça que j'ai perdu le goût de mon plaisir...
> La mère dit encore à son enfant :
> -Reste comme tu es. Ne m'écoute plus jamais. Promets-moi. Jamais. (*ACN* 210-211)

The hat worn by the daughter permits her to differentiate herself from her mother as the daughter has access to *jouissance*. The hat represents the daughter's willingness to distance herself from her mother. Laurie Vickroy associates the man's fedora with power (equating male with power) and she sees it as "a challenge to the inadequacy of childhood [and] it allows her [the daughter] to see herself as another, as a separate agent affecting her own future" (Vickroy 1993, 19). The hat also allows the daughter to become whatever she desires. Her choice to wear it represents independence and her introduction to the world as her own person, and she can therefore be viewed as she wants to be viewed:

> […] sous le chapeau d'homme, la minceur ingrate de la forme, ce défaut de l'enfance, est devenue autre chose. […] Soudain je me vois comme une autre, comme une autre serait vue, au-dehors, mise à la disposition de tous, mise à la disposition de tous les regards, mise dans la circulation des villes, des routes, du désir. (*A* 20)

The girl's mother occupies an insignificant position in French colonial society due to her status as a destitute single mother. The daughter may also decide to wear the man's hat as a means of affirming her desire not to follow in her mother's footsteps of being in a state of inferiority, therefore setting the daughter apart from the mother. The boundary between genders becomes blurred

by the young girl wearing this hat. It also shows that the girl is not afraid to transgress the limits established in a patriarchal society. This aspect of the character's personality can be viewed as positive in that it not only challenges the unspoken rules of male dominance, but it shows as well that she is refusing to act like her mother, meaning perhaps that she will not be a victim of patriarchy. She is beginning to assert her subjectivity and to refuse to be a mirror reflection of her mother. This will allow these two female characters to move towards a sense of mutual acceptance and recognition in their relationship (Günther 2002, 92). The relationship with the Chinese lover also transgresses the unspoken rules of the colonial society in which they live. By having a love affair with the Chinese man, the daughter goes against her mother's wishes. Her mother believes that her daughter is forever tainted by having associated with a man from the colonized group, and the daughter will never marry:

> Dès qu'elle a pénétré dans l'auto noire, elle l'a su, elle est à l'écart de cette famille pour la première fois et pour toujours. [….] Sa fille court le plus grand danger, celui de ne jamais se marier, de ne jamais s'établir dans la société. (*A* 46, 73)

The Abject and a Daughter's Sexual Desire

The work of Julia Kristeva concerning the imaginary, the symbolic, and more importantly, the role of abjection, is useful in helping to unravel this complex process of separation between mother and child. For Kristeva abjection is the juncture between the imaginary and the symbolic. According to Martha Reineke, reaching the symbolic is not an easy task: "It is a violent, clumsy

breaking away, with the constant risk of falling back under the sway of power as securing as it is stifling" (21). In this way abjection represents a stage where the child is not prepared to cross over to the symbolic and the mother is not ready for the dissolution of their relationship. The child is considered as neither subject nor object, with abject being the stage between the two. Abjection is the point where the child feels a push and pull effect between wanting to experience subjectivity and knowing that permanent maternal fusion is not an option but at the same time feeling the horror of separation from the mother. Kristeva points out that this stage is not limited to childhood; it can in fact occur at any point in the subject's life. The image of a mother who devours the lives of her children, leaving little to spare for individual growth on the part of her children, is presented to the reader of these particular Durassian works. The attempt at separation from the mother seems to be a lifelong struggle for the girl's character. Corbin posits that the absence of the father in these texts is an underlying current in the ongoing state of abjection: "As there is no paternal intervention, there is no protection or diversion from the mother's overwhelming force" (91).

The relationship fostered between the young girl and her lover in *Un Barrage contre le Pacifique, L'Amant,* and *L'Amant de la Chine du Nord* serves as a stepping stone to liberation from being engulfed by the mother: "Until another phallic intervention can assist the daughter's entry into the symbolic order, she floats in a semiotic confusion of identity" (Corbin 91). A blossoming sexuality is part of the girl's sense of self and how she relates to the world. In

turn, it provides an opportunity for the girl to step back and examine her role in a relationship outside of the one with her mother. Thus a fissure appears in the overlapping boundaries of mother and daughter. In *Un Barrage contre le Pacifique,* we witness the sexual encounter between Suzanne and Agosti which prompts an awareness of sexual desire in Suzanne:

> Alors qu'il l'embrassait, […] elle fut dès lors, entre ses mains, à flot avec le monde et le laissa faire comme il voulait, comme il fallait. […] Plusieurs fois de suite, Suzanne récapitula les gestes de Jean Agosti, minutieusement, et chaque fois ils faisaient naître en elle un même trouble rassurant. Elle se sentait sereine, d'une intelligence nouvelle. (*BCP* 340, 356)

However, the break from her mother's grip is not concretized by finding a channel for sexual desire. Indeed it is important to acknowledge that the mother's influence is always difficult to escape. For example, in *L'Amant*, the daughter believes she sees an image of her mother who appears in the Chinese lover's apartment while they are making love: « L'image de la femme aux bas reprisés a traversé la chambre » (*A* 50). The apartment represents an exile from familial space but even here, thoughts of the mother invade the couple's lovemaking. Even in a state of desire where she tries to find an outlet to extricate herself from her mother, the maternal presence still haunts the daughter.

Mental Instability and Violence

If we consider Duras's literary works to resemble an interweaving of narrative threads, then mental instability, melancholy and violence are surely part

of this complex system of intersection. While mental instability may originate from excessive love on the mother's part towards her children, it also stems from social influences such as the colonial context of the novels considered in this chapter. The mother's state of psychic fragility and/or depression has a profound effect on the relationship between mother and child and illustrations of its negative effect on the family's children abound. For example, in *Un Barrage contre le Pacifique,* the very first page of the text reveals the cloud of gloom and hopelessness that surrounds the bungalow: « [E]ux trois saturés d'ennui et d'amertume » (*BCP* 13). In fact the mother is the ultimate source of despair for her children: « [L]a vie était terrible et la mère était aussi terrible que la vie » (*BCP* 141). In *L'Amant* the narrator emphasizes the intensity and the chronic nature of her mother's poor mental state and how it still haunts the narrator day after day:

> Ce grand découragement à vivre, ma mère le traversait chaque jour […]. J'ai eu cette chance d'avoir une mère désespérée d'un désespoir si pur que même le bonheur de la vie, si vif soit-il, quelquefois, n'arrivait pas à l'en distraire tout à fait. […] C'était chaque jour. De cela je suis sûre. □a devait être brutal. À un moment donné de chaque jour ce désespoir se montrait. (*A* 22-23)

The daughter's acknowledgement of her mother's difficult life helps her in her attempts to free herself from the mother because it shows that the daughter sees her mother situated in a social context, which de Kanter argues is one of the crucial steps in the daughter's developmental process (de Kanter 26).

Violence is often a result of mental instability and despair. In both *Un Barrage contre le Pacifique* and *L'Amant,* the beatings the daughter receives from

her mother are a manifestation of her mother's misery. Although she has strived to gain control over her life, she has failed repeatedly. The injustice she faces due to the French colonial system has left her exhausted and in her exhaustion she strikes out against her own daughter.

Violence is also manifested in *Des Journées entières dans les arbres* in the relationship between mother and son.[3] When Jacques was a child, his mother was not interested in working and she noticed that her son displayed the same lax attitude as he was growing up. Allusions to the family's past poverty show that the mother had dealt with many obstacles, perhaps an oblique reference to the core story of Duras's mother's financial ruin in Indochina, although it is important to note here that there is no reference in this particular text of the mother having lived in Indochina. As she struggled to make a living for the family, the mother could not bear to see her son remain idle so she would beat him:

> Il tient de moi, mademoiselle, si vous saviez comme j'étais paresseuse. Une vraie couleuvre. À quinze ans on me retrouvait dans les champs, endormie dans les fossés. (*JEA* 29) [...] quand je pense que vous étiez tous là à dormir comme des anges dans tous les coins de la maison [...] et que moi je pleurais parce que j'avais des dettes. (*JEA* 57) [...] quand j'ai vu que Jacques ne faisait toujours rien, je me suis dit que c'était cet instinct-là que j'avais qui lui revenait. Alors j'ai commencé à le battre, à le battre. Tous les jours. A dix-huit ans je le battais encore. (*JEA* 29)

In *Écriture féminine et violence : Une Étude de Marguerite Duras,* Jane Ricouart discusses how violence is often directly linked to an overpowering

[3] Eileen Angelini views Duras's rewriting of autobiographical elements as a beneficial tool that permits Duras to reexamine her past life experiences. In Angelini's opinion, Duras's re-presentation of her own life fragments will in turn allow the reader some insight into Duras's understanding of her own past. Angelini suggests that writing the story of the intense relationship marked by obsession and violence between mother and son in *Des Journées entières dans les arbres* may have permitted Duras to better comprehend the bond between her own mother and older brother.

feeling of love that the mother possesses towards her child. According to Ricouart, violent behaviour originates from two sources and illustrations of these sources can be pinpointed in this particular Duras text: firstly, the mother's powerful love for her son is frightening and one of the ways she deals with this overpowerful mixture of love and fear is through ferocious beatings. Secondly, looking at her son, the mother sees a negative reflection of herself which was difficult to deal with since at the time she was failing even to eke out a living for the family. Beating her son allows the transfer of her personal feelings of defeat onto him, allowing him to be the subject of failure, not her (90). This type of projection of blame from mother onto child is also evident in both *Un Barrage contre le Pacifique* and *L'Amant.* These texts demonstrate how the mother's undesirable qualities and self-hatred are projected onto her daughter, leaving the daughter to deal with being a scapegoat for the mother's devalued state. In this way, the mother continues the cycle of female subordination rather than encouraging her daughter to reject the patriarchal negation of female empowerment. For example, in *L'Amant,* the young girl tells her Chinese lover that she prefers to be abused and treated like a prostitute instead of being valued and loved. This rather perverse desire leads back to the vicious circle of ill-treatment observed within the maternal household. Since the girl knows no other way to behave, she simply repeats a similar pattern of abuse in her relationship with the Chinese lover (Günther 2002, 88-89):

> Elle [la mère] s'était jetée sur elle [Suzanne] et elle l'avait frappée avec les poings de tout ce qui lui restait de force. […] En la battant, elle avait parlé des barrages, de la banque, de sa maladie, de la toiture, des leçons du piano, du cadastre, de sa vieillesse, de sa fatigue, de sa mort (*BCP* 136). […] À cette époque-là, de Cholen, de l'image, […] ma mère a un sursaut de folie. […] Dans des crises ma mère se jette sur moi, elle m'enferme dans la chambre, elle me bat à coups de poing, elle me gifle […]. (*A* 72-73)

Ricouart also discusses a theory formulated by R.D. Laing concerning psychosis as it relates to reactions to unbearable circumstances. Laing asserts that madness is an understandable response to an oppressive society that renders living unendurable (Laing 1967, 79). The mother's mental instability in Duras's texts can therefore be interpreted as a coping mechanism allowing her to deal with her numerous attempts to cultivate the land granted to her by the colonial government and to build dykes against flooding from the Pacific Ocean. She pours all her energies into rebuilding the sea wall and even recruits the help of several local people from the village. This physical struggle against the Pacific Ocean is the key metaphor for the battle she and the colonized people of Indochina face against the French. The sea wall represents the mother's concerted yet ridiculous efforts to overpower the indestructible forces of nature and the colonial system. The colonial government continually knocks down the efforts of the native people just as the sea rolls in and devours the constructed wall:

> Au bout d'une semaine tous à peu près s'étaient mis à la construction des barrages. Un rien avait suffi à les faire sortir de leur passivité. Une vieille femme sans moyens qui leur disait qu'elle avait décidé de lutter les déterminait à lutter comme s'ils n'avaient attendu que cela depuis le commencement des temps (*BCP* 54). […] Puis, en juillet, la mer était montée comme d'habitude à l'assaut de la plaine. Les barrages n'étaient pas assez puissants. (*BCP* 57)

Jane Bradley Winston argues that *Un Barrage contre le Pacifique* represents Duras's harsh critique of the French colonization of Indochina. By presenting such a text to the French reading public, Duras unveils the true oppressive conditions of colony life for both the colonized and the poor white settlers. Duras's repeatedly crumbling sea wall and mental instability of the mother would expose to the public the ruthless, all-powerful reign of the colonial government and the consequences for not only the native population but also for French settlers from the mother country:

> [*Un Barrage contre le Pacifique]* would lay out the discursive veil of French colonial ideology iterated by the protagonist's mother; then, like the crabs it thematized, it would eat holes in that *barrage* – or rather, it would have its various witness bearers do so. [...] Destabilizing the psychic structures of the French colonial subject, it would precipitate a withdrawal of popular support of Empire and help end French colonial rule. (Winston 29)

Since the mother cannot advance in her fight against the French colonials, she directs her frustrations towards her children; thus they bear the brunt of their mother's misfortunes. We witness this in both *Un Barrage contre le Pacifique* and *L'Amant.* In the former text, Suzanne "accepts" beatings and ill-treatment inflicted by her mother. This abuse is in a way therapeutic for the mother as it is an outlet for years of disappointment and failure. In this way as well, the children are drawn into their mother's web of misery and the boundaries between mother and child become blurred: « [L]es enfants, conscients des souffrances de la mère, risquent d'être totalement 'dévorés' par cette prise de conscience et d'être incapables de devenir autonomes » (Ricouart 1991, 91):

> Elle [la mère] avait eu tellement de malheurs que c'en était devenu un monstre au charme puissant et que ses enfants risquaient, pour la consoler de ses malheurs, de ne plus jamais la quitter, de se plier à ses volontés, de se laisser dévorer à leur tour par elle. (*BCP* 183-184)

In Suzanne's character we also see evidence of the love-hate relationship the daughter has with the mother. Suzanne observes her mother's mental breakdown and destruction of her life. Early in the text she is « un personnage obéissant, qui comprend la violence de la mère » (Ricouart 1991, 92), someone who endures her mother's abuse because she recognizes that her mother's world has disintegrated. Yet at the same time, Suzanne harbours resentment and a growing hatred towards her mother. She wishes for a permanent escape from the bungalow and from her mother's violent and suffocating tendencies. This desire to break free from her mother's mental instability becomes more apparent throughout the novel as she becomes defiant in the face of her mother's mistreatment. Aware that the mother will never win her struggle against the colonial government, Suzanne begins to break the pattern of passivity in the face of her mother as she realizes the importance of liberating herself from her mother's control:

> La mère se dressa et essaya maladroitement d'assener une gifle à Suzanne. Suzanne ne s'esquiva pas, elle attrapa sa main et l'immobilisa complètement. La mère la regarda, à peine surprise, puis elle dégagea sa main […] (*BCP* 234). Fous-lui la paix, dit Suzanne, au bout de trois cent kilomètres, c'est peut-être ton droit mais tu l'auras pas, c'est comme toujours, tu crois que t'as droit à tout et t'as droit à rien. La mère tenta un mouvement de main vers elle mais elle se souvint. C'était désormais inutile. (*BCP* 238)

The mother realizes that her daughter will no longer obey her mother's orders or be an outlet for her mother's frustrations through accepting physical violence (*c'était désormais inutile*). Suzanne finally voices her thoughts on not only her mother's futile battle with the colonial administration but also on her mother's dwindling control over her children (*tu crois que t'as droit à tout et t'as droit à rien*). Suzanne refuses to be a mirror image of her mother in a powerless position and the only way she can break this cycle is to confront and challenge her mother's authority.

It is important to note here that the sibling relationship based on love and power in *Un Barrage contre le Pacifique* also has a strong influence on the decisions and actions of the daughter. Joseph's departure from the bungalow prompts Suzanne to once again wear the dress given to her by M. Jo. Joseph's comments about the dress resembling something a prostitute would wear caused Suzanne to retire it to her mother's closet. The link here to the mother is that with Joseph absent, Suzanne freely wears the dress because of her need to be distanced from the mother, both physically and psychologically. Waiting at the bridge by the side of the road, Suzanne hopes to capture the attention of a man willing to free her from the prison of the mother's home. The dress is simultaneously a symbol of freedom from maternal engulfment and a metaphor for Suzanne's realization of her burgeoning sexual desire:

> Elle en retira sa plus belle robe, […] celle qu'elle avait mise quelquefois à la ville et dont Joseph disait que c'était une robe de putain. […] Suzanne avait cessé de la mettre pour que Joseph ne l'engueule pas. […] En enfilant cette robe, Suzanne comprit qu'elle faisait un acte d'une grande importance, peut-être le plus important qu'elle eût fait jusqu'ici. (*BCP* 320)

Like Suzanne, the young girl in *L'Amant* also is conscious of her mother's mental instability. The daughter believes that her mother's mental fragility is fundamental to her existence: « [C]'est là que je vois clairement la folie pour la première fois. Je vois que ma mère est clairement folle. […] Elle l'était. De naissance. Dans le sang. Elle n'était pas malade de sa folie, elle la vivait comme la santé » (*A* 40).

The daughter associates memories of her mother with depression, and outbursts of rage and sadness: « Je lui dis [au Chinois] que dans mon enfance le malheur de ma mère a occupé le lieu du rêve » (*A* 58). Like many of Duras's fictional female characters, the mother integrates coping mechanisms into her daily life, such as resorting to physical violence, in order to deal with her mental instability.

In *L'Amant de la Chine du Nord* the reader is presented with a much more somber and passive mother, one who appears to have withdrawn from day-to-day life. In *Soleil noir: Dépression et mélancolie* Julia Kristeva devotes a chapter to a discussion of the internal pain and madness found at the heart of Duras's writing: « Au bord du silence émerge le mot « rien », défense pudique face à tant de désordre, interne et externe, incommensurable » (231). The Durassian narrator signals to the reader that the character of the mother in this novel has also dealt

with the same desperation and wretchedness as the maternal personage in the two previous texts but that this time the mother is seen in a different light. No longer fighting against the injustices done to her by the French colonial government or subjecting her children to her outbursts of rage, she has simply given up: « La mère n'empêche plus rien. Elle n'empêchera plus rien. Elle laissera se faire ce qui doit arriver. Cela tout au long de l'histoire ici racontée [my emphasis] » (*ACN* 15). In this example from the text, it is the daughter who acts aggressively toward the mother: « La mère se laisse insulter, maltraiter. Elle est toujours dans cette autre région de la vie, celle de cette préférence aveugle. Isolée. Perdue » (*ACN* 26). The roles of passive acceptance and of assertiveness are reversed here, compared to Suzanne and her mother in *Un Barrage contre le Pacifique* or the young girl and her mother in *L'Amant*.

In *L'Amant de la Chine du Nord,* the daughter is no longer afraid to express her feelings and she actually confronts her mother about the elder brother being the preferred child in the family. There is even mention of the daughter's attempt to provoke her mother's darker side of abuse evidenced in the two earlier works; however, the mother doesn't respond: « L'enfant crie encore. À la faire se taire. À la gifler. […] L'enfant est suppliante: mais rien n'y fera. […] La mère, toujours sans pleurs aucun. Morte de vivre » (*ACN* 26-27). There is a movement in this particular text towards a certain understanding and a new level of communication between mother and daughter. The young girl also openly

expresses her desire to be loved by her mother and the relationship generally takes on a new facet of tenderness in comparison to the two earlier works.

The daughter's fear of falling into the depths of depression and madness like her mother is also manifested by the daughter's fear of the beggar woman who appears throughout many of Duras's texts. The beggar woman can be seen as the mother's alter-ego since she embodies what happens when mental fragility causes one to be at the point of no return and when one gives up on any pretense of functioning in society. The beggar woman as a physical manifestation of madness in Duras signals the importance of addressing psychological suffering in the Durassian universe. Many women in Duras's texts teeter on the edge of mental instability, yet they manage to carry on in day-to-day life by developing coping mechanisms (for example, excessive drinking for Anne Desbaresdes in *Moderato Cantabile* or having numerous love affairs for Anne-Marie Stretter in *Le Vice-consul).* Like the mother in the texts studied here, these women live and breathe their mental instability, it is at the core of their being. Yet the thought of spiraling into the depths of madness is seen as the ultimate fear, worse than dying. The daughter dreams of being chased by the beggar woman and fears that once physically touched by her, she too will be contaminated and go mad:

> Et tout à coup je suis sûre que derrière moi quelqu'un court dans mon sillage. Tout en courant je me retourne et je vois. C'est une très grande femme, très maigre, maigre comme la mort et qui rit et qui court. Elle est pieds nus, elle court après moi pour me rattraper. Je la reconnais, c'est la folle du poste [...] Le souvenir est celui d'une peur centrale. [...] si la femme me touche, même légèrement, de la main, je passerai à mon tour dans un état bien pire que celui de la mort, l'état de la folie. (*A* 103-104)

> Elle dit que de tous les gens, ce sont ces femmes qui font le plus peur. Parce qu'elles rient en même temps qu'elles pleurent. (*ACN* 111)

Indeed laughter is often associated with madness and the dilemma of being trapped in a social structure in Durassian texts. For example, in *Un Barrage contre le Pacifique,* the shoddy B12 driven by Suzanne's family is compared to the luxurious Maurice Léon Bollée roadster owned by M. Jo, signaling the difference in class between M. Jo and Suzanne's family. Yet rather than being embarrassed or intimidated by her family's obvious lack of wealth, the mother is overcome with laughter. Laughing is the mother's « pied de nez au destin, [sa] manière de triompher de [sa] misère » (Bardet 37) :

> À la place du phare…il sert aussi de phare…le caporal c'est notre radiateur et c'est notre phare, dit Suzanne. Ah ! j'étouffe…tais-toi…tais-toi…dit la mère. […] La force de son rire ne semblait pas venir d'elle et gênait, faisait douter de sa raison. (*BCP* 50-51)

Ricouart suggests that the limits or restrictions of the maternal role imposed on women often have an adverse effect on their psychological well-being and that these "restraints" need to be reevaluated in terms of the role mothers play in society. This theory can be applied in the case of the Durassian mother, who is constrained not only by being a single parent but by decisions made by the French colonial government as well. She is expected to be the sole provider for her family in an environment that is plagued by poverty, hunger and corruption. Ricouart believes that « les limites imposées à la femme par sa fonction sociale de mère en font parfois un être marginal » (Ricouart 1991, 36). According to Ricouart, a reconsideration of women's roles in general, a cornerstone of many of

Duras's works, would allow women to move towards individualism and a higher sense of self-worth. This shift in position would in turn open the door to dialogue about the consequences of personal and social malaise and to finding a suitable outlet for repression other than physical or emotional violence (Ricouart 1991, 36).

Reanalyzing the Daughter's Subjectivity

As we have seen, impending separation from the mother can trigger an array of emotions, which can sometimes have dire consequences for the individuals involved. Chodorow explains that the daughter often finds herself in a state of restlessness where the attraction to merging her identity with that of her mother is in diametric opposition to self-definition:

> All these attempts involve oscillations in emotions and ambivalence. A girl alternates between total rejection of a mother who represents infantile dependence and attachment to her, between identification with anyone other than her mother and feeling herself her mother's double and extension. (138)

Although it can be a tumultuous and sometimes prolonged stage, the child's pursuit of independence, especially for daughters, requires a certain level of understanding between mother and child. In order for the daughter to arrive at a level of mutuality in her relationship with her mother, in order to see herself as a distinct human being and separate from the mother or to develop her own subjectivity, the daughter must comprehend the ways in which her mother may have failed to evolve and thrive in her own social and physical subjectivity (Lane

1999, 226). As discussed earlier, Duras's young female protagonist recognizes that her mother has not experienced sexual pleasure. Finding herself in a state of sexual ecstasy, the young woman enters uncharted territory, which becomes a key point in her evolution towards independence. If her mother has a negative connection to her own body and to her own sexuality, the daughter may succeed in shattering the continuation of this problematic image of the female body and female eroticism. She will perhaps be able to create her own sexual experiences and not follow the norms set out by society and by extension, her mother:

> Et pleurant il le fait. D'abord il y a la douleur. Et puis après cette douleur prise à son tour, elle est changée, lentement arrachée, emportée vers la jouissance, embrassée à elle. [...] Je me demande comment j'ai eu la force d'aller à l'encontre de l'interdit posé par ma mère. Avec ce calme, cette détermination. (*A* 50-51)

By imposing established norms upon her daughter, the mother is not only preventing her daughter from experiencing a spontaneity that contributes to individuality, she is also reinforcing patriarchal views and expecting her daughter, as a woman, to abide by a set of rules and standards that tend to suffocate feminine expression and autonomy. In the male-defined space of sexual desire, there is little room for expression of female creativity or enjoyment. The mother's attempts to pass on feminine devaluation by teaching her daughter that a female's self worth is a product of male assessment and acknowledgement are partially thwarted in Duras by a daughter who begins to take charge of her own sexual pleasure. In *Un Barrage contre le Pacifique* the young female protagonist's ventures to do so surface when Suzanne's sexual encounter with Agosti leads her

to « une intelligence nouvelle » (*BCP* 356). Being aware of sexual desire and acting on it is even more explicit in *L'Amant,* where we witness the young girl seizing the opportunity for pleasure:

> [E]lle le ramène vers elle et elle commence à le déshabiller. […] Il veut faire des gestes pour l'aider. Elle lui demande de ne pas bouger. Laisse-moi. Elle dit qu'elle veut le faire elle. Elle le fait. Elle le déshabille. Quand elle le lui demande il déplace son corps dans le lit […]. (*A* 49)

However, it must be remembered that for the major plotline in *Un Barrage contre le Pacifique* the mother is in charge of "selling" her daughter to a rich suitor who will marry her and provide for the rest of the family. And in *L'Amant* the mother prostitutes her daughter when she allows the relationship with the Chinese lover to carry on if a sum of money is paid to the family.

The rewriting of *L'Amant* to *L'Amant de la Chine du Nord* signals an attempt to understand and come to terms with the mother's own absence of social subjectivity, of her failure to successfully play a role in society other than her maternal one. Through the filter of the narrator's voice in *L'Amant* we hear about the mother's words and actions. The narrator goes against her mother's wishes and eventually becomes a writer and in this way, she keeps the mother's voice alive in the text. She also relives the horrors of her childhood sparked by the mother's violent outbursts and all–consuming state of melancholy. Through writing, the narrator has the possibility of one day comprehending the relationship she had with her mother:

> The daughter's text, emerging from that prohibition [the mother's], can no longer contain the voice of the enraged mother, even though it takes shape around that missing voice in the effort to give it life, to keep it alive, to open the door that might allow her to understand it. (Hirsch 148)

This attempt to "make sense" of a complex connection is taken a step further in *L'Amant de la Chine du Nord* when the narrator inserts the mother's dialogue into the storyline.

For Duras's young female protagonist, the process of disconnection from the maternal sphere is painful despite years of cruelty inflicted upon her by her mother. In *L'Amant* she states, « [J]e ne pourrais pas encore quitter ma mère sans en mourir de peine (52) and refers to her mother as "ma mère mon amour » (31), signaling that she still considers her mother to be the first love of her life. The same subtle but meaningful reference to the mother as her « amour » (124) can also be found in *L'Amant de la Chine du Nord.*

In this chapter I explored the passionate attachment and identification that characterize mother-child relations. The ambiguous nature of the mother-child bond arises from the constant shift between love and hate, dependence and rejection in their relationship. Through my analysis of *Un Barrage contre le Pacifique, Des Journées entières dans les arbres, L'Amant,* and *L'Amant de la Chine du Nord* I examined the ways in which Duras re-evaluates the rupture between mother and child:

> Figure essentielle de l'oeuvre durassienne, la mère, à la fois objet d'amour et de rejet, représente la grande rivale des personnages féminins. Pour se libérer de son emprise, ces derniers doivent se confronter à elle. (Bourgeois 135)

The impact of the social context on the mother-child relationship is crucial for an analysis of the child's differentiation from the mother. Duras's texts often highlight the link between subjectivity and social factors and in the case of the daughter in Duras, the mother often negates female subjectivity because she has no role to play outside of maternity and has no voice in society; she cannot therefore be a positive role model for her daughter.

The way in which the mother views her own body, femininity, and social status affects the bond between mother and daughter. In terms of femininity, the Durassian mother devalues the female body by prostituting her daughter and using her for financial gain. In this way, the mother reinforces the patriarchal attitude of depending on men to define a woman's value (Flaake 8). This transference of misogynist values from mother to daughter is problematic since "the identification between mother and daughter still works powerfully to establish patterns that will be repeated in her [the daughter's] future relations, with her lover especially" (Vickroy 1993, 18). The mother has been deprived of sexual pleasure and cannot relate to her daughter who is developing sexually.

Chapter Three: The Durassian Love Story Recreated

> [D]uras's work displays a keen awareness of how the most intimate relations are compelled by, but also resistant to, ideologies of race, social status, and sexual mores first learned in the family. The couple's doomed relationship becomes entrapped within these ideologies, but the transgression of them fuels their desire and encourages the girl to further free herself from her pathologically solitary family (17-18).
>
> -Laurie Vickroy

If asked to characterize the Durassian love story, Duras's readers would most likely apply descriptors such as *triadic* or *impossible.*[1] In Duras's texts, the conventional dyadic romantic relationship fails due to an intervening third party and Duras creates multiple possibilities concerning the identity of this third individual. Imagine a visual representation of what the classic tale of "man meets woman and falls in love" looks like in the fictional world created by Duras: the mind's eye envisions a triangle which represents the triadic relationship, and its borders may extend or shrink according to the shift of the balance of power

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[1] In many of Duras's texts love is often linked with impossibility and there is often the intervention of a third party or factor that affects the love affair between man and woman. For example, in *Moderato Cantabile* the relationship between Anne Desbaresdes and Chauvin, a man she meets daily at a café, will never come to fruition partly because of a difference in class. Having witnessed the scene of a murder, a crime of passion, Anne wishes that she could find a man passionate enough to kill her. According to Henri Hell, « Cet amour avec Chauvin est impossible parce que l'amour dont rêve Anne est l'amour absolu, l'amour fou, qui ne s'accomplit pleinement que dans la mort » (127). Like Anne, Sara in *Les Petits Chevaux de Tarquinia* is also searching for the perfect love affair and attempting to escape the boredom that characterizes the day-to-day routine of marriage. Sara takes a lover during a family vacation at an Italian seaside resort, hoping to find her version of ideal love and perhaps liberate herself from marital stagnation. Murphy believes that "[Sara's] dissatisfaction with her marriage is based on romantic notions of a perfect, idealized love […]. Like Anne Desbaresdes, she finds herself torn between the forces of order and disorder, and her attraction to the stranger is inevitable […]" (49).

dictated by the relationships between those who occupy the three corners. In the three texts analysed in this chapter, *Un Barrage contre le Pacifique (*1950), *L'Amant* (1984) and *L'Amant de la Chine du Nord* (1991), the girl's mother, older brother and younger brother interfere in the love affair that develops between the female protagonist and her male lover, causing a rupture in the evolution of the relationship. The extent to which each of these family members influences the love affair varies from text to text, thus emphasizing the critical role played by rewriting in painting a detailed portrait of the connection between people we call "love". My intention is to focus on the girl's three family members as the crux of my argument about the re-presented, disrupted love affair but to also consider the role played by additional influential powers, such as the male lover's father. Outside the familial structure, class, race and the colonial setting further interact to form a shield that forbids the continuation of the couple's affair and is seemingly beyond the control of any party forming the triad. Elements of not only the culture of the family but also of colonial society are replicated in the relationship developed between lovers.

Desire is the fulcrum of many of Duras's re-worked tales of love and it is most often inseparable from the complex relations of power that dominate the triangular representations of the love story. According to Raylene Ramsay, "[Desire in Duras] maintains tensions and interactions at all levels of functioning of the text" (Ramsay 1996, 194). Desire is also frequently linked to despair, death and/or narcissism. One of the foci for my analysis stems from the varied forms

through which desire is manifested in Duras: for example, through sibling incest, sexual relations, separation from the family, and objects of desire – wealth, autonomy, the lover's body, etc. Can desire be satisfied in these contexts or is one always forced to suppress his or her longing? Spatial configurations within the texts, such as at the bungalow, in the lover's apartment, or at the restaurant with family also affects the circulation of desire. Certain spaces either highlight or suppress differences between classes, race, or gender, all of which wield a powerful influence on the inner workings of the novels.

Desire in Duras's texts is never fixed, never static; like the love story itself, desire is affected by aspects of colonial society (race and class) that it intercepts over the course of the texts. The ebb and flow of desire is also altered by the nature of the relationship between brother and sister, as well as the daughter's desire to liberate herself from her mother. For example, the sexual awakening of Suzanne in *Un Barrage contre le Pacifique* is closely tied to her need to escape her overpowering mother. While Duras incorporates a love story between the young protagonist and her older male suitor in *Un Barrage contre le Pacifique,* it is nonetheless the family that is foregrounded in this earlier text. The love story intensifies however as we examine works from the latter part of Duras's *oeuvre*, namely *L'Amant* and *L'Amant de la Chine du Nord,* as the frequency of sexual encounters escalate and the female protagonist takes on an increasingly initiatory role in sexual encounters.

From a feminist point of view, the position of female desire fluctuates and often takes precedence over male desire. Consequently the depth and breadth of female sexual experience and female desire expand as Duras writes incest and transgressed gender boundaries into her texts. She includes fearless women daring to meet the male gaze and sometimes overpowering it. Over the course of the three texts, Duras moves towards reframing the traditional position of women and desire; where women have traditionally been the object of male desire, the object of the male gaze, "méconnue, oubliée, diversement glacée en spectacles" (Irigaray 1974, 180), Duras often puts women in the place of the subject.

Desire transcends not only gender but also race, class and family influence. The circulation of desire in Duras is founded on the unattainable; it is indestructible in her texts and in order "to preserve the possibility of desire it is necessary to reiterate difference" (Hill 1993, 42). And this is what Duras does as she intertwines the critical motifs of race and class with desire. The impossibility for the lovers ever to solidify their relationship in the long term leaves the door open for desire to pervade the Durassian texts written in her later writing career. It also permits speculation on how the relationship will be re-presented in the next text since the love story is never given closure.

Obviously one of the primary concepts associated with desire is sexuality. The presentation of a fledgling female protagonist discovering her sexuality and her reaction to this newfound desire is reworked over the course of the three texts. Rather than always identifying with the role imposed on a woman by her male

lover, Duras's writing explores women who attempt to forge their own sexual identity and who resist being cast in the mould of the Other. One of the ways they try to accomplish this is through the power of the gaze and reversing the traditional roles of subject and object.

During the process of reworking particular facets of the love story, Duras silences no aspect of sexuality (prostitution, incest, homosexuality or violence). By breaking the silence on these taboo subjects, she broadens the expression of the female experience. These tools enhance the young woman's growing independent position in relation to controlling her sexuality. For example, through her sexual encounters, the daughter sets herself apart from her mother's experiences as a female who no longer knows sexual pleasure.

Self, Other and Sexual Awareness

The desire to individuate is often expressed through sexuality in Durassian texts. The daughter's sexual development and her wish to be independent are in ongoing conflict with restrictions set by the family, and in particular by the mother, on the daughter's encounters with men. Duras presents a mother figure who lashes out at her daughter for attempting to liberate herself from the mother's grip: "Autonomy, rather than experienced as a way of pleasing the mother and being supported by her, is experienced as a rejection of the mother, for which the daughter in turn will be rejected" (Flax 179). In *Un Barrage contre le Pacifique,* Suzanne frequently spends time next to the bridge near the family bungalow,

daydreaming about the arrival of a suitor who will take her away from the family home and her mother forever: « Un jour un homme s'arrêterait, peut-être, pourquoi pas? Parce qu'il l'aurait aperçue près du pont. Il se pourrait qu'elle lui plaise et qu'il lui propose de l'emmener à la ville » (*BCP* 21).

A feeling of enclosure and entrapment is related not only to the physical location of the bungalow in the middle of the jungle but also to the engulfing presence of the mother and her ability to limit and supervise Suzanne's encounters with men. The mother sees her daughter as a potential commodity that can be exchanged for financial prosperity and she tries to pass on her sexist and stereotypical beliefs to her daughter through controlling who spends time with her daughter. She wants to teach her daughter to accept the patriarchal restrictions that will secure a place for the daughter as an object to satisfy a man's needs and desires. However, it then becomes the daughter's decision to reject or comply with the mother's standards: [T]he mother often tries to shape her daughter according to misogynistic values, the daughter often refuses to model herself on this figure who signifies an oppression that the daughter needs to reject (Corbin 120).

Drawing from Irigaray's theory on the mother's powerlessness and how it is also passed on from generation to generation, we see that the mother in *Un Barrage contre le Pacifique* is in this way not only transmitting her misogynist beliefs to Suzanne but also the subordinate position for women that stems from subscribing to these values (Irigaray, *Et l'une ne bouge pas sans l'autre* see pp.

10, 13, 16*)*. The mother is unable to relate to the female experience and there is no mention of close camaraderie with another woman in any of the texts studied here. The closest female (other than the daughter) to the mother is Dô, the housekeeper in *L'Amant* and *L'Amant de la Chine du Nord*. Dô and the mother are similar in that both are single women with a socially marginal status:

> […]Dô. C'est la gouvernante qui ne quittera jamais ma mère même lorsqu'elle rentrera en France, même lorsque mon frère aîné essaiera de la violer dans la maison de fonction de Sadec, même lorsqu'elle ne sera plus payée. Dô a été élevée chez les sœurs […]. (*A* 28)

It is unknown whether Dô has ever married or been romantically involved with a man, but we do know that the mother, on the other hand, had a husband who passed away in France after returning from the colony due to poor health. These two women have no voice with which to speak from their position in society's lower class but they are also silenced sexually. From the above quote we see that Dô's sexual experience is forced upon her by another man and from the following quote, Joseph talks about his mother who no longer knows the pleasure brought by sexual relations: « Chaque fois qu'il [Joseph] avait fait l'amour avec cette femme [Lina], il avait pensé à elle [la mère], il s'était souvenu qu'elle, elle n'avait jamais fait l'amour depuis que leur père était mort […] » (*BCP* 281). The daughter in *L'Amant* also states that her mother is deprived of sexual pleasure: « La mère n'a pas connu la jouissance » (*A* 50). In *L'Amant de la Chine du Nord* the mother confirms what her children believe about her lack of sexual desire: « Et puis moi [la mère], j'étais trop sérieuse, je l'ai été trop longtemps…c'est comme ca que j'ai perdu le goût de mon plaisir » (*ACN* 210).

If the mother cannot speak of her own femininity, how can she possibly relate to her daughter as she discovers her own body and sexuality? The daughter cannot acknowledge her mother as a woman and a mother; the mother is incapable of looking at her daughter as a young woman and a daughter. According to de Kanter, stressing the importance of mothers as women, placing emphasis on the mother's role outside of the maternal sphere, is critical to the question surrounding mothering and the separation of mother and child:

> As feminist scholars, it is our task to [...] contextualize the theory of the mother-child relationship by stressing the importance of the woman's position as a third term in the mother-child relationship. [...] Her position as a woman situates the mother in the symbolic. If we acknowledge the mother is never completely fused with her child, her womanness can split into a triangular relationship. (de Kanter 28)

The mother has become the product of an androcentric society and displays tendencies associated with masculinity rather than femininity. Two factors that add both to the mother's masculinization and to her inability to identify with and support her daughter's sexual awareness are the missing father and the mother's adaptation to this "loss". Corbin posits that the absence of a traditional parental structure in Duras allows for a continuing, almost overwhelming mother-daughter symbiosis. This state of being devoured by the mother could be remedied by the introduction of a third party, or the addition of a man to the mother-daughter dyad, a "phallic intervention" (91), which would aid the daughter in liberating herself from the mother and allow her to enter into the symbolic order (91). The process of attempting to break free from the mother's grip initiates a shift in the daughter's view of both self and other. The daughter is

able to begin viewing the mother as a separate individual, as an other, creating a rupture. For example, in *Un Barrage contre le Pacifique,* finding a lover represents a path to liberation from a dominating mother, thereby linking the desire for autonomy to Suzanne's sexual awakening. But the mother represses Suzanne's sexuality by not permitting her to be left alone in the bungalow with M. Jo while M. Jo provides Suzanne with some of the tools needed to prepare herself for the definitive leave-taking from her mother and brother. For example, the dress given to Suzanne by M. Jo symbolizes both her new-found confidence and her desire for an identity that is separate from that of the family: « Et en enfilant cette robe, Suzanne comprit qu'elle faisait un acte d'une grande importance, peut-être le plus important qu'elle eut fait jusqu'ici » (*BCP* 320). Suzanne's failure in becoming romantically involved with M. Jo leads to her first sexual experience with Agosti, which allows her to "gagne[r] la révélation de sa féminité et du plaisir physique" (Guers-Villate 24) and in turn reinforces her plan to leave the family home and her mother forever.

Do women in Duras try to free themselves from their mothers but at the same time retain their subordinate place in relation to men? There is more evidence of this in *Un Barrage contre le Pacifique* than in the other two texts; for example, Suzanne wants to escape the bungalow and her mother, but she tries to do this by presenting herself as an attractive object needing to be rescued. Although she is extricating herself from the family, she is reinforcing what her

mother, brother and M. Jo have taught her to do: to offer herself as a sexual object for men.

The desire to create and be in control of one's destiny is manifested not only through sexuality but through writing as well. The girl in *L'Amant* and *L'Amant de la Chine du Nord* expresses a desire to one day become a writer but this idea is not warmly received by her mother. However, the girl can talk openly to her Chinese lover about her dream of writing and according to Adler "the lover is the first to [...] believe that the child wants to become a writer" (56):

> -[La fille parle] Puis un jour on parlera de nous, avec des nouvelles personnes, on racontera comment c'était.
> -[le Chinois parle] Et puis un autre jour, plus tard, beaucoup plus tard, on écrira l'histoire. [...] Et un jour on mourra.
> -Oui. L'amour sera dans le cercueil avec les corps.
> -Oui. Il y aura des livres au-dehors du cercueil.
> -Peut-être. On ne peut pas encore savoir.
> Le Chinois dit :
> -Si, on sait. Qu'il y aura des livres, on sait. (*ACN* 195)

In *L'Amant* the reader bears witness to an intense experience of growth and change thanks to the relationship fostered between the girl and her Chinese lover. From the moment the young girl meets her Chinese lover on the ferry crossing, she begins to distance herself from her mother: « Dès qu'elle a pénétré dans l'auto noire, elle l'a su, elle est à l'écart de cette famille pour la première fois et pour toujours » (*A* 46). The narrator herself admits that the link to her family is an integral part of who she is, and she is aware of the dysfunctional nature of her family's dynamic. The interactions between family members help to concretize

views that the girl has of herself and of her mother and brothers. She knows that letting go will not necessarily mean breaking free:

> Je suis encore dans cette famille, c'est là que j'habite à l'exclusion de tout autre lieu. C'est dans son aridité, sa terrible dureté, sa malfaisance que je suis le plus profondément assurée de moi-même, au plus profond de ma certitude essentielle […]. (*A* 93)

Sexual desire is a barrier that separates mother from daughter and sets in motion the process of differentiation. The girl knows that this type of desire sets her apart from her mother since « la mère n'a pas connu la jouissance » (*A* 50). The mother is deprived of her own subjectivity, not only sexually but socially as well. For example, the basic plotline of *Un Barrage contre le Pacifique* is based on the mother's failed attempts to build sea walls and cultivate crops on her land. This defeat, combined with the fact that she is a white widow in a colonial society, is an illustration of a woman whose social subjectivity has been denied (Lane 1999, 226). The girl's exploration of her own sexual identity can be seen as an attempt to gain power; she will use her body and sexual prowess for financial gain, something that the mother is incapable of doing for the family. In this way, creating an image of self is tied not only to autonomy but also to the drive for power: "The possibility of self-representation is shown to vary depending on the power of the person who is seeking to establish an identity" (Corbin 109).

Unfulfilled Desires

In both *L'Amant* and *L'Amant de la Chine du Nord* the lack of love from the mother and the resulting feelings of abandonment are bound up with the daughter's relationship with the Chinese lover. As their relationship grows, the lover fulfills the girl's need for the love and desire missing in her relationship with the mother. In this way, he becomes a sort of intermediary mother, representing a maternal warmth and fusion that the girl has never experienced:

> Elle va se doucher. Il vient. Il le fait pour elle, il la lave à la manière indigène, avec le plat de la main, sans savon, très lentement (*ACN* 85). […] Elle se retourne, se blottit contre lui. Il l'enlace. Il dit qu'elle est son enfant, sa soeur, son amour (*ACN* 114). Je t'aime aussi comme mon enfant, pareil. (*ACN* 149)

Corbin sees the confusion of mother and lover in *L'Amant* and *L'Amant de la Chine du Nord* as a manifestation of the theory that the mother is the child's first love. The fusion of the mother's and child's body throughout pregnancy cannot be discarded from the discussion on the triad of mother-daughter-lover and separation (120).

Although the lover plays a motherly role, their relationship is not simply based on the fulfillment of a void left by her mother. The girl also becomes an object of sexual desire for her lover. Laurie Vickroy points out that this combination of maternal-style love and eroticism fulfills the girl's carnal as well as her emotional needs and is therefore "the girl's love ideal" (Vickroy 1998, 126). Vickroy views the Chinese lover's motherly care of the girl as transference in that he takes on the maternal role since her own mother has often been unable

to tend to the basic needs of a child, even bathing and feeding her (Vickroy 1998, 127). Plunged into the depths of depression and mental instability, the mother is caught up in the tentacles of the colonial system that deprives her of earning a living to support the family:

> [T]he child's psychological development occurs within a socioeconomic system that also strongly affects the mother. The socioeconomic system, along with patriarchy, impinges on her ability to provide emotional support needed by the child. Because her own psychological development occurred under patriarchy, it would have left an imprint upon her feelings about herself, about being a woman and being a mother. These feelings would in turn affect the type of mothering she would provide a child. (Flax 173)

The lover in all three texts displays characteristics similar to those of the mother in that he, too, treats the young woman as an object. In *Un Barrage contre le Pacifique* M. Jo believes that buying Suzanne's affection and bribing her to eventually have sexual relations with him reflects the mother's attitude about her daughter. The Chinese lover in *L'Amant* supports the prostitution of the young girl by paying her, regardless of the love he feels towards her: « Il me dit: tu es venue parce que j'ai de l'argent. […] Il dit que décidément il n'a pas eu de chance avec moi, mais il me donnera quand même de l'argent, de ne pas m'inquiéter » (*A* 52). And in *L'Amant de la Chine du Nord,* the girl continues to show tendencies of accepting her objectified position in relation to her lover:

> Devant elle, en retrait de la porte du lycée, la limousine chinoise. Seul le chauffeur est là. […] Elle ne lui pose aucune question. Elle sait. Elle est emportée par le chauffeur à son amant. Livrée à lui. Cela lui convient. Pendant tout le trajet on reste sur elle qui ce soir regarde le dehors sans le voir. (*ACN* 98)

Due to the cinematic nature of this text, the girl is not only an object demanded by and transported to her lover, she is also the object of the reader's gaze, a reader who can envision, thanks to Duras's filmic-style writing, the girl who is commodified and delivered to her "owner". Laura Mulvey discusses the typical heroine in narrative film who is, through the gaze, both a sexual object for male figures within the film and for the spectator in the audience: "Traditionally, the woman displayed has functioned on two levels: as erotic object for the characters within the screen story, and as erotic object for the spectator within the auditorium [...]" (19).

Re-evaluating Power Relations

Power relations take on several forms in the three texts studied in this chapter. As explained above, while the mother figure has a strong desire to control her children's lives, Suzanne sees the possibility of marrying a rich man as a means of escaping her obsessive mother. Her mother is the key decision maker in this relationship and Suzanne allows her mother to determine her future. Suzanne has not yet defined her own identity and is easily led by a mother who sees a wealthy husband for her daughter as the key to the family's prosperity.

The balance of power between the girl and her lover in *L'Amant* is re-evaluated in *L'Amant de la Chine du Nord* by modifying particular scenes and adding details. For example, Duras presents a friendly exchange between the mother and the Chinese lover when he arrives to discuss the proposition made by

his father. In this way, Duras pushes the traditional limits established between different racial groups in the colony, particularly the white French colonizers and the Chinese population.[2] They understand each other's point of view and there is a level of respect between the pair:

> Ils se regardent. Ils se sourient. […] Il s'arrête de parler. Ils se regardent avec émotion. Elle, elle voit derrière le sourire, enchaîné à ce sourire, le désespoir à peine marqué de l'héritier de Sadec. […] Dans le silence qui se fait, la mère dit très bas : Vous aimez cette enfant tellement… (*ACN* 134-5)

However well this interaction goes, there is still the divide between them in terms of class and race and the mother shows a newfound understanding of the lover's suffering. She knows the relationship between her daughter and the Chinese man is doomed to fail because of circumstances they cannot change. The daughter is also aware of the impossibility of the relationship and of her ability to manipulate the situation. The daughter recalls the hardships to which her mother has been subjected by the corrupt colonial system and feels a need to compensate her powerless mother, which in turn fuels her motivation to financially exploit her lover (Ramsay 1994, 51):

> Elle est seule avec l'argent, elle est émue par elle-même devant l'argent qu'elle a réussi à prendre au-dehors. Avec la mère elles ont fait ça : elles ont pris : l'argent. Doucement, tout bas, elle pleure. […] Pas de douleur, non rien de ça. (*ACN* 179)

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[2] Julia Waters discusses the position occupied by the Chinese in Vietnam's history, as well as the French attitude toward the Chinese during French colonization of Indochina and the relationship between the two groups: "While the French colonization of "Indochina" lasted less than a century, China's imperialist claims to the region date back more than two millennia. […] French colonial attitudes towards the Chinese reflected the specificity of their position in Indochina: while the French feared the threat that the Chinese, as former colonizers, might pose to their own colonial presence, they also exploited the Chinese control of trade in Indochina, using Chinese merchants as go-betweens – "indispensable enemies" – in their negotiations with the indigenous population." (179)

The virtual absence of emotional connection between lovers in *Un Barrage contre le Pacifique* is in contrast to the love affair presented in *L'Amant* and *L'Amant de la Chine du Nord* where the relationship is more complex as sexual encounters and affection are intermingled with the existing aspects of race, class and family influence. Suzanne's exploitation of M. Jo manifests not only her wish to be wealthy and to save her family but also her desperation to leave the plain by means of marriage:

> […] Suzanne s'assit devant lui et le regarda […]. Mais elle se mit à se distraire de lui presque aussitôt, tout en continuant à le regarder sans le voir, comme s'il eut été transparent, et qu'il lui fallait passer par ce visage pour entrevoir les promesses vertigineuses de l'argent. (*BCP* 101-102)

Raylene Ramsay points out that the male lover is fighting against the influence of two masculine voices on opposing levels of the class hierarchy, expressing their opposition to the relationship because of the expectations of the colonial system. In the case of the lover's father, he threatens to disinherit his son from the family fortune if he continues to see the young white girl. The girl's lover cannot disobey his father, but at the same time neither can he suppress the passion he feels towards the girl (Ramsay 1994, 53). The lover must also deal with the girl's older brother, who revels in his superiority as a colonizer:

> In *L'Amant* […] he [the Chinese lover] is presented as weak and ineffectual before the older brother in this scene [at the restaurant] where the young Marguerite joins cruel ranks with her poor, but scornfully racist white family. […] The lover from North China is in the power of his father's law, […] as much in the desperate power of money as is Duras'mother. (Ramsay 1994, 53)

However, in *L'Amant de la Chine du Nord,* the Chinese lover is depicted as a fearless man when faced with the older brother's threats. The scene at the restaurant shows a reversal of power relations portrayed in *L'Amant*. Instead of shying away from the older brother's threatening behaviour, the Chinese lover stands up to him and openly mocks him. The rest of the family is more welcoming towards him as opposed to the detached, cold demeanor illustrated in *L'Amant :*

> La mère parle "pour parler". Pour rien dire. Heureuse. Elle dit n'importe quoi (160). [...] Il [le Chinois] traverse la piste de danse. Il s'avance vers le frère aîné attablé à côté de la mère. Il s'approche très près de lui. Il le regarde trait après trait comme s'il était passionnément intéressé. Le frère aîné prend peur. (*ACN* 165)

Although certain scenes are reworked from one text to the next, the exploitation that is generated between the heroine and her lover is a reccurring factor. The complex balance of power in their relationship shifts in reaction to particular circumstances such as the social setting, desire, the presence and absence of the family in certain scenes and so on.

Crossing Gender Boundaries

The concept of the gaze is intricately bound up with desire in the fictional universe created by Duras and is recurringly re-presented in relation to other critical themes such as self-representation and sexuality. The gaze is a form of exerting influence and power, of accepting or declining a traditionally forced passive position. Although the conventional yet now contested hierarchy of gender in western society is to place man in the dominant position, does Duras

comply with this traditional standard or does she push the envelope by providing the reader with a feminist perspective where women effectively break the mould in which they were set? Corbin believes that Irigaray's feminist theory on the mirror and the way in which a woman's reflection there is traditionally reduced to satisfying male specularity is useful for the male gaze in Duras:

> [S]a possession par un « sujet », le désir de son appropriation par un « sujet », est-il encore vertige de sa faillite. Car là où il (se) projette un quelque chose à absorber, à prendre, à voir, à posséder… et encore un sol sur lequel se tenir debout, une glace où se mirer, il a déjà affaire à une autre spécularisation. (Irigaray 1974, 166).

And in terms of the Durassian love story, the way women are viewed and view themselves as the object of the gaze differs from a male perspective of his own objectified position:

> The specificity of the woman's role in the specular economy of Western culture is important in these texts. Without women's complicity, this aspect of male dominance could not function. Women need to see themselves as objects to help men see them as objects. (Corbin 98)

The gaze in *Un Barrage contre le Pacifique* is linked to the more traditional concepts concerning the relative positions of women and men in terms of gender roles. Suzanne allows herself to be objectified when she agrees to appear more attractive and feminine for M. Jo. She aligns herself with the traditional image of the physically appealing woman who is pleasing to the male eye:

> […] M. Jo apprenait à Suzanne l'art de se vernir les ongles. […] Elle portait une belle robe de soie qu'il lui avait apportée, parmi d'autres choses […]. Sur la table, étaient disposés trois flacons de vernis à ongles de couleur différente, un pot de crème et un flacon de parfum. […] Il lui avait acheté du savon parfumé à la lavande et depuis, elle se baignait deux et trois fois par jour pour avoir l'occasion de se parfumer. (*BCP* 99, 105)

However, the roles of subject and object related to the gaze are complicated by Suzanne's awareness of the "monetary value" of her body and the mother's control over her daughter's relationship with M. Jo. Suzanne complies with her mother's patriarchal standards by permitting M. Jo's sexual voyeurism and in doing so learns she can use her body for financial gain. M. Jo knows that satisfying his carnal desire by having sexual relations with Suzanne is impossible at the given time because her family is holding out for his marriage proposal, which will in turn stabilize their financial future. Suzanne is also aware of this benefit for the family; if the colonial backdrop did not exist, perhaps Suzanne would not be exchanging views of her naked body for material objects and money.

Corbin asserts that the way in which a woman chooses to represent herself is tied to the potential outcome of her future situation as dependent on her family or autonomous (98). Suzanne's choice to present her body as available for men's pleasure either by allowing M. Jo to see her naked or by appearing seductive in feminine clothing next to the road where hunters pass on the plain or in the city is indicative of her desire to leave her family behind. During M. Jo's visits, her mother and Joseph keep a close watch on the bungalow while the couple spends

time alone, thus controlling Suzanne's exposure to a sexual encounter: « Et si elle [la mère] exigeait qu'ils laissent la porte du bungalow ouverte, c'était pour ne laisser à M. Jo aucune issue que le mariage à l'envie très forte qu'il avait de coucher avec sa fille » (*BCP* 68). Her virginity is commodified and will be exchanged for financial stability and wealth, thereby allowing class to be a factor in the circulation of desire. M. Jo has to settle for bribing Suzanne with material objects in exchange for a glimpse of her untouched and unseen body:

> M. Jo demanda à Suzanne de lui ouvrir la porte de la cabine de bains afin qu'il puisse la voir toute nue, moyennant quoi il lui promit le dernier modèle de La VOIX DE SON MAÎTRE et des disques en plus, les dernières-nouveautés-de-Paris. […] Et aucun homme au monde n'avait encore vu celle qui se tenait là derrière cette porte. (*BCP* 72-73)

M. Jo's sexual desire and the female body as object of the gaze are both rationalized by being treated as a natural progression in the story of man meets woman. Irigaray believes this is a view widely supported by patriarchal ideology: « Oui l'œil – y compris délégué au sexe – de l'homme pourra prospecter le sexe de la femme, y chercher de nouvelles sources de profits » (Irigaray 1974, 180). It reinforces traditional views of women who accept their position as satisfying men's desires:

> Il avait très envie de la voir. Quand même c'était là l'envie d'un homme. […] Ce n'était pas fait pour être caché mais au contraire pour être vu et faire son chemin de par le monde, le monde auquel appartenait quand même celui-là, ce M. Jo. (*BCP* 73)

In *L'Amant* the young girl chooses to dress provocatively on the ferry and therefore attract men's attention and be the object of the male gaze. In doing so,

the girl is not only objectified by her Chinese lover but she also actively participates in the exchange of seeing and being seen. Instead of continuing to assume the passive position of being watched by men and prostituted by her mother and older brother, the young girl decides to control her own sexual encounters and sexual pleasure:

> J'ai déjà l'habitude qu'on me regarde. […] Depuis trois ans les blancs aussi me regardent dans les rues et les amis de ma mère me demandent gentiment de venir goûter chez eux à l'heure où leurs femmes jouent au tennis au Club Sportif. (*A* 25-26)

The Public and the Private

In terms of the gaze, space plays a role in permitting more freedom for desire to circulate through the gaze, which ultimately leads to carnal pleasure, thus fulfilling both sexual desire and the desire to individuate. Exhibiting a curiosity about sexuality is partially due to taking away an environment that is controlled not only by the family's presence but also by the judgmental opinions of colonial society in general. The bungalow setting in *Un Barrage contre le Pacifique* stifles the possibility of satisfying desire through sexual encounters since it is a space that is surrounded and monitored by the family. M. Jo's sexual attraction to Suzanne is not reciprocated although she is in the initial stages of discovering sexual desire: « Il est en présence de l'éveil de sa sexualité adolescente et elle découvre le désir du désir, du pouvoir d'un corps qu'elle ignorait » (Papin 131). It is in the forest with Agosti, far from the mother's bungalow, that she gives in to sexual longing. It is important to note that although

Suzanne defies her family by giving up her virginity for free (as opposed to exchanging it for the family's financial gain) this encounter with Agosti is marked by Suzanne's passivity. She may have disobeyed her family's patriarchal rule, but once again she is faced with the male gaze and allows herself to be objectified by it. Agosti undresses her, exposing her nude body and her innocence as she refuses to meet his gaze:

> Bouton par bouton, lentement, il commença à lui déboutonner sa blouse. […] On commençait à lui voir ses seins et il écarta la blouse pour les découvrir complètement. […] Puis, avant de la toucher, il se redressa un peu et la regarda. Elle fermait les yeux. (*BCP* 339-41)

Suzanne's first sexual encounter takes place in the open forest, available for all passersby to see. Although she gives in to sexual desire, she would have preferred to be masked by the shadows and blackness of Agosti's room. Imagining the blanket of darkness at Eden Cinema where Suzanne first witnessed the "perfect" love affair unfolding on the big screen, she finds herself wishing to be enveloped by the darkness which offers comfort and anonymity:

> Ils laissèrent le champ d'ananas et pénétrèrent dans la forêt. […] [S]ans doute, Suzanne aurait-elle préféré la chambre que Jean Agosti avait à la cantine de Ram. Ils auraient fermé les volets et, à part les raies de soleil qui seraient entrées par les jointures des fenêtres, c'aurait été un peu l'obscurité violente des salles de cinéma. (*BCP* 338-39)

The Chinese lover's apartment in *L'Amant* may act as a shelter from accusations, but Duras does not cut the couple off entirely from the effects of living in the colony. The space offers some protection from prying eyes but their close proximity to the rest of society is evident from the noise that penetrates the

room and the shadows of people passing on the street leave the impression that the room is invaded by the outside world. The lovers are reminded that they are still vulnerable to the harsh judgement of the outside world:

> [E]lle [la chambre] est entourée du vacarme continu de la ville, embarquée dans la ville […]. Le lit est séparé de la ville par ces persiennes à claire-voie, ce store de coton. Aucun matériau dur ne nous sépare des autres gens. Eux, ils ignorent notre existence. Nous nous percevons quelque chose de la leur […]. Le bruit de la ville est si proche, si près, qu'on entend son frottement contre le bois des persiennes. (*A* 52-55)

In *L'Amant de la Chine du Nord,* both the Chinese lover and the girl are depicted as fearless and sure of themselves during their initial meeting on the ferry, the space that represents the girl's impending separation from her family. The meeting between the young poor white girl and the wealthy Chinese man takes place in this public space divided according to race:

> C'est le bac sur le Mékong. Le bac des livres. […] Dans le bac il y a le car pour indigènes […]. Ils [la fille et le Chinois] se regardent. Se sourient. Il s'approche. […] Elle le regarde fort. Farouche serait le mot pour dire ce regard. Insolent. Sans gêne est le mot de la mère […]. L'enfance apparaît dans ces regards d'une curiosité déplacée, toujours surprenante, insatiable. (*ACN* 36-37)

Colonization is the wedge driven between the two lovers as it generates ideologies that make cross-cultural relationships taboo. Class and race are classified within the regulatory system of colonization, allowing the colonial system to dictate what is right and wrong. Both the Chinese lover's father and the girl's family subscribe to this system of beliefs, basing their opposition on what is perceived to be the norm. Joane Nagel explores the intersections of ethnicity and sexuality as well as the boundaries and tensions that can be the result of such a merging. Adhering to

social norms of sexual behaviour set out to create boundaries between ethnic groups is paramount for reinforcing ethnic differences:

> Ethnic boundaries are also sexual boundaries. Ethnicity and sexuality join together to form a barrier to hold some people in and keep others out, to define who is pure and impure, to shape our view of ourselves and others, to fashion feelings of sexual desire and notions of sexual desirability. [...] Standards of ethnic group honor are created and enforced to support ethnic reproduction agendas. As a result, members of ethnic communities pay a great deal of attention to insiders' sexual demeanor. (Nagel 1, 56)

Spatiality permits exploration and sexual experimentation in the apartment because it is physically isolated from the girl's family. However, her mother and brothers do taint this environment by haunting the girl's conscience:

> L'image de la femme aux bas reprisés a traversé la chambre [...]. L'ombre d'un autre homme aussi devait passer par la chambre, celle d'un jeune assassin [...]. Celle d'un jeune chasseur aussi devait passer par la chambre [...]. (*A* 50, 122)

In reworking the relationship between the girl and her lover in *L'Amant,* Duras underlines the importance of female desire and the representations of woman's position in relation to sexual desire. When Duras describes the young girl sexually dominating her Chinese lover, she pushes the limits of traditional female and male roles by demonstrating that both women and men are active participants in the creation and circulation of desire. Trista Selous believes that Duras attempts to represent woman outside of the traditional position established for her by man. According to Selous, woman is inherently the subject of desire and without this, her potential to be an object of desire would be meaningless:[3]

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[3] Selous supports Duras's vision of female desire in *L'Amant:* « Il n'y avait pas à attirer le désir. Il était dans celle qui le provoquait ou il n'existait pas. Il était déjà là dès le premier regard ou bien il n'avait jamais existé » (*A* 28).

> I do think it is valid to describe Duras's writing as giving a place to femininity, where this is defined as a position within a relation of (sexual) desire and not as an effect of fixed meanings attached to anatomical makeup. [...] I would argue that, [...] it is basic to the construction of a woman as object of desire that she be seen also as subject of desire. The important factor which either facilitates or precludes her construction into the position of object of desire is the kind of desire of which she is seen as being the subject. (235)

The Chinese lover becomes the object of the girl's gaze, a concept incompatible with traditional patriarchal views. The girl alters conventional relations of power by choosing not to play the passive female who only exists to satisfy a man's sexual desires. Instead, she is the voyeur and receives pleasure from treating him like a sexual object:

> La peau est d'une somptueuse douleur. Le corps. Le corps est maigre, sans force, sans muscles, il pourrait avoir été malade, être en convalescence, il est imberbe, sans virilité autre que celle du sexe, il est très faible [...]. Elle le touche. Elle touche la douceur du sexe, de la peau [...]. (*A* 49-50)

The girl reverses traditional male and female roles in a love affair and re-negotiates a "feminine" space of freedom from patriarchal constraints. She treats her lover as a man typically would treat a woman: she objectifies him through the gaze and emphasizes his fragile body and satisfying her sexual needs. As a young woman experiencing her first sexual encounter, "[she] maintains self-possession and literally conducts their sexual relations, she refuses to submit to the undertow of masculine desire that seeks to make an object of woman" (Staley and Edson 294).

Duras may also be highlighting the difference in race here since the girl identifies with the dominant French colonial group while the Chinese lover

belongs to a minority group in Indochina. However, one must note that while she finds herself in a position of power because of her race, the Chinese lover's status as a wealthy man places him in a class above the girl's poverty-stricken family.[4]

The reversal of customary male and female roles and the need to construct her identity are again accentuated when the young girl wears a man's hat on the ferry crossing in *L'Amant.* Renate Günther logically points out that the masculine and feminine roles portrayed in this scene do not correspond to their respective biological genders. In contrast, gender is seen here as a reflection of interaction between fictional characters and their resulting representations (Günther 1993, 31):

> [...] it becomes apparent how Duras undermines traditional gender distinctions and replaces them with more intricate and ambiguous representations of 'masculinity' and 'femininity'. Gender in *L'Amant* corresponds less to biological sex than to different ways of being and relating to others. (31)

Duras continues to play on the sexual openness of the female protagonist in *L'Amant de la Chine du Nord.* During their first evenings spent together at the apartment, the girl overrides traditional gender labels and initiates sexual relations with him when he is reluctant:

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[4] Waters points out that in *L'Amant* the narrator is careful to pinpoint the position of the Chinese lover's family within the class system of the colony: « Chinois. Il est de cette minorité financière d'origine chinoise qui tient tout l'immobilier populaire de la colonie » (*A* 33).

> -[Le Chinois parle à la fille] Tu n'as pas seize années. Ce n'est pas vrai. […] Il dit : C'est un peu effrayant. […] Et c'est alors qu'elle le fait, elle. Les yeux fermés, elle le déshabille. Bouton après bouton, manche après manche. […] L'enfant. Elle est seule dans l'image, elle regarde, le nu de son corps […]. Elle le regarde encore et encore, et lui il laisse faire, il se laisse être regardé. Elle dit tout bas : C'est beau un homme chinois. (*ACN* 78-79)

The Chinese lover is seen by the girl and passively allows her to watch him and comment on his body. The girl objectifies her lover, just as a man would normally do to a woman during a sexual encounter. The gaze is an integral part of this text since the categories of novel and film scenario merge to present "the story of a young woman and how she is created by the gaze" (Corbin 97).

Another example of the shattering of conventional gender stance in *L'Amant* concerns the behaviour of the younger brother. When faced with his older brother who terrorizes and beats him on a regular basis, he plays a passive role. In this way, he resembles the Chinese lover since both of them represent a typical female stereotype of being without rights or voice when confronted by an authoritative male:

> […] mon frère aîné […] qui à chaque instant de chaque jour de la vie de ce petit frère faisait la peur dans cette vie […] (*A* 13-14). […] C'est alors que j'entends la voix de mon frère aîné, il dit une phrase très courte, cinglante, définitive. […] Tout s'arrête ; je reconnais la peur de mon amant, c'est celle de mon petit frère. (*A* 66)

Transgressing the Forbidden

For Leslie Hill desire in Duras's literary works is invariably linked to wanting what is unattainable. Several factors found in Duras's writing render

something or someone inaccessible (race, blood ties, class, gender). Hill argues that since desire and unavailability are so intricately linked in Duras's writing, the impossibility of satisfying desire comes through in the relationships fostered between lovers throughout her fictional world:

> In their disdain for socially legitimized relationships, Duras's characters are disturbingly anti-essentialist in questions of love or desire. Duras shows more interest in infidelity or flirtatiousness than in love as a process of enduring idealization or sublimation. Desire is always already founded on a recognition of the prohibition that makes the object of desire remote and unattainable. (Hill 1993, 43)

A motif of incestuous ties between brother and sister is evident in *Un Barrage contre le Pacifique, L'Amant,* and *L'Amant de la Chine du Nord.* While incest is discussed in more detail in my chapter on the family, I believe it merits mention here as well as it affects interaction between the female protagonist and her lover. In the more traditional style text, namely *Un Barrage contre le Pacifique*, Duras merely hints at or masks incestuous situations and thoughts in her characters rather than giving an explicit description of sexual encounters between siblings as she will do in *L'Amant de la Chine du Nord:*

> Aucun homme ne l'avait vue vraiment nue, sauf Joseph qui montait quelquefois se laver les pieds au moment où elle prenait son bain (*BCP* 72). […] Quand il [Joseph] réfléchissait comme ce soir, avec difficulté et avec dégoût, on ne pouvait pas s'empêcher de le trouver très beau et de l'aimer très fort. (*BCP* 144)

There is evidence in *Un Barrage contre le Pacifique* of a strong desire on Suzanne's part to replace M. Jo with her brother Joseph. Several quotes from the text indicate her preference for her brother: « Depuis qu'elle connaissait M. Jo,

Suzanne le [Joseph] trouvait beaucoup plus beau qu'autrefois » (*BCP* 128) and some of the situations presented evoke images of a couple in a romantic relationship:

> Ils valsaient sur l'air de *Ramona*. Ils avaient l'air heureux de danser ensemble. […] Ils avaient les mêmes épaules, ses épaules à elle [la mère], le même teint, les mêmes cheveux un peu roux […]. Suzanne ressemblait de plus en plus à Joseph. (*BCP* 98)

This quote does, however, insist on the physical similarities between brother and sister, underlining Duras's mixture of incestuous ties and what is considered to be "normal" familial affection.

In *L'Amant de la Chine du Nord* the girl's maternal love for her younger brother Paulo and her need to protect him from the eldest brother's abuse parallel the sexual encounters between the girl and Paulo. The girl talks to her lover about her sexual experiences with Paulo and their complex relationship characterized by motherly love and sexual desire:

> -[La fille parle au Chinois] Je t'ai désiré tout de suite…très vite très fort à ce moment-là…c'est vrai.
> -Autant que ton petit frère…
> Elle réfléchit. Elle dit :
> -Comment dire ça…mon petit frère c'est aussi mon enfant…
> -Ton petit frère ne t'a jamais prise.
> -Non. C'était moi qui le prenais avec mes mains. (*ACN* 149)

Duras also blurs the boundaries between incest and romantic relationships with her portrayal of the Chinese lover in *L'Amant*. Reworking the idea of an incestuous relationship between sister and brother adds a perspective that intensifies the confusion between who is the lover and who is the brother. Two points further complicate an accurate tracking of rewriting of scenes linked to

incest and sexual encounters: first, the level of intensity of emotional and sexual encounters is heightened between the girl and her lover, and second, Joseph is now "split" into two brothers, a younger and an elder brother (however, the younger brother is more important for the discussion on incest). Seeing her lover's naked body evokes memories of sexual relations with her younger brother and the experience of having sex with her lover is mixed with the memory of her desire for her brother (Schneider 125):

> Je commençais à reconnaître la douceur inexprimable de sa peau [le Chinois], de son sexe [...]. Celle [l'image] d'un jeune chasseur aussi devait passer par la chambre [...] quelquefois il était présent dans la jouissance et je le lui disais, à l'amant de Cholen, je lui parlais de son corps et de son sexe aussi, de son ineffable douceur, de son courage dans la forêt et sur les rivières aux embouchures des panthères noires. (*A* 122)

The Durassian theme of going against the ideological grain in *L'Amant* and *L'Amant de la Chine du Nord* elicits feelings of shame as both the girl and her lover are aware that their families will never approve of a marriage and the colonial society in which they live frowns upon interracial relationships. Their relationship is doomed to fail from the beginning and this expected failure is related to the inability to bring fulfillment to the relationship. Vickroy adds to this point when she states that the inadequacies of the relationship find their roots in family relations that fail to address the child's needs: "the lover is given the role the mother could not fulfill" (Vickroy 1998, 127). The girl identifies with the teachings of her family and the values they have instilled in her, a situation that causes her to act differently towards her lover when in the company of her family. Her actions thus become a reflection of the thoughts and values circulated within

her family. The contradictions in her actions and her feelings towards him simply add to the existing complexity of their affair:

> Nous prenons tous modèle sur le frère aîné face à cet amant. Moi non plus, devant eux, je ne lui parle pas. En présence de ma famille, je dois ne jamais lui adresser la parole. [...] En présence de mon frère aîné il cesse d'être mon amant. Il ne cesse pas d'exister mais il ne m'est plus rien. [...] Il devient devant mon frère un scandale inavouable, une raison d'avoir honte qu'il faut cacher. (*A* 65-67)

In conclusion, through the Durassian portrayal of the love story between man and woman, the reader bears witness to the interplay of desire and power relations that fluctuate and circulate both within a single text and from text to text. As stated by Anne-Marie Gronhovd, "[p]ower has no stable and linear set of rules by which it abides. It functions from top to bottom and bottom to top" (102). Re-visioning the triadic relationship that represents the Durassian love story calls for a consideration of the outside influences occupying the third position in the triangle: the family, class, race, and the colonial setting. Due to one of these intervening elements in the lovers' relationship, the love affair dissolves but not before it pushes boundaries established by existing social and/or cultural contexts:

> Each lover has conflicting emotions, is torn between his or her desires and family oppositions. Their love is powerful, yet insatiable and "inconsolable". Social and familial taboos help to create desires, yet ultimately cause the lovers to reject one another. They are alienated from one another; only their desires, physical and emotional, can briefly transcend the difference in their cultures and their inability to communicate. (Vickroy 1993, 27)

The young girl's need to individuate in *Un Barrage contre le Pacifique, L'Amant,* and *L'Amant de la Chine du Nord* is expressed through sexuality and sexual desire. In the re-presented portrayal of the love affair, the young girl's

transgressive acts go beyond traditional boundaries of gender, racial, and sexual identity. The interracial relationship and the inversion of conventional gender roles (either through the gaze, clothing or sexual dominance) in *L'Amant* and *L'Amant de la Chine du Nord* destabilize the underpinnings of expected norms in colonial society. The rewriting of the love story in these Durassian texts shows the way in which the daughter differentiates herself from her mother and family and begins to reject the misogynist attitude that circulates within the family. When the love story fails as it inevitably does in Duras, madness is often the result.

Chapter Four: Madness Revisited

> Related motifs of memory, madness and desire emanate from this central thematic core of alienation and absence. Memory functions as the attempt to re-create a past love, and in many of the novels, [...] to remember a past story [...]. Madness gradually takes hold of successive protagonists who distance themselves from others and withdraw into the recesses of their imagination in an attempt to relive (or rewrite) a past (13).
>
> -Carol J. Murphy

In this chapter I consider the rewriting of madness from *Le Ravissement de Lol V. Stein (*1964) to *Le Vice-consul* (1966) through an analysis of fictional characters whose very 'existence' is centred around emptiness and psychic fragmentation. Both texts exhibit essential themes that extend across much of Duras's writing: abandonment, loss, death, and ambiguity. My analysis will focus on madness on an individual level (that is, how madness both affects and is manifested by the fictional characters in question) and how this phenomenon affects society as a whole. The interaction of social (the bourgeois society in *Le Ravissement de Lol V. Stein),* political *(*the colonial setting in *Le Vice-consul),* and psychoanalytical positions in the two texts are crucial.[1] I propose to examine how cultural norms are used to set boundaries as to what is perceived as acceptable or

[1]The mother in many of Duras's texts (most notably in *Un Barrage contre le Pacifique)* is another pivotal example of a Durassian character teetering on the edge of madness. The mother's symptoms and possible causes of madness are discussed in detail in the previous chapters on the family and the mother-child relation.

normal in terms of mental stability and how such boundaries can affect identity formation or contribute to the erasure of self. As Carol J. Murphy states:

> They [alienation and absence] are overriding themes which reverberate throughout the corpus in various synonymous forms – disjunction, disunion, separation, expectation, estrangement, void, emptiness, sterility, and, by extension, memory, madness and desire (Murphy 1982, 10).

Given that my principal focus in this study concerns Duras's rewriting, I consider how the concept of social "interference"[2] is rewritten, arguing that two different motifs relating to causes of madness are at work in the two texts: failed love in *Le Ravissement de Lol V. Stein* and colonialism in *Le Vice-consul.* How does Duras succeed in re-presenting the overall theme of madness in these two texts but uses a different variable that is connected to stirring up madness in each? Duras integrates the aspect of rewriting into her character's "existence" by relying on the importance of reliving or returning to an original scene of loss or hopelessness.

What is madness in relation to the Durassian characters examined in this chapter and what are the examples of madness at play in the texts? Madness is presented as mental illness and is usually associated with some traumatic event. Descriptions of the abnormal behaviour or symptoms displayed by the protagonists constitute a large proportion of the texts. The way in which the physical, cultural, political and emotional obstacles surrounding them affect their unstable existence is also a main focus in each text. These manifestations of madness are analyzed in more detail in following sections, but generally speaking

[2] I use the word *interference* here to refer to any exterior influences that affect the fictional character's mental stability.

they span a broad spectrum, ranging from withdrawal and repression to a more serious and threatening indication in the form of attempted murder. Loss of speech, indifference, repeated or prolonged aimless wandering, and a concerted effort to mask dysfunction are all examples of these symptoms.

Both *Un Barrage contre le Pacifique* and *Le Vice-consul* provide critiques on colonial society and thus allow us to explore the techniques used by Duras to recreate the complex relationship between madness and the struggle against imperialism. At the time of publication of these two Duras texts, imperialism dominated the world political scene in one form or another, whether there were conflicts tied to imperialism (confrontations between the colonizer and colonized) or nations gaining their independence. Indeed the publication of *Un Barrage contre le Pacifique* in 1950 coincided with the start of the US-Korean war. Around the time of the appearance of Duras's novel on the literary scene, much activity was also taking place in French Indochina. In 1945 with the rise of Ho Chi Minh Viet Minh to power in Vietnam, the French had attempted to regain control over their dwindling power in their Asian colony, leading to the Franco-Vietnamese war. 1948 and 49 marked victories for the colonized of the region as Cambodia and Laos respectively gained their independence. Positive change driven by resistance and revolt eventually led to the total end of French involvement in the area in 1954 (Lazarus xxiv-xxvii). Years later the publication of *Le Vice-consul (*1966) corresponded to the declaration of independence for

Barbados, Botswana, Guyana and Lesotho, formerly under British rule (Lazarus xxxii).

In her texts Duras employs a mixture of the European preoccupation with exoticism, the parallel fear of difference and the psychic, physical, social and cultural consequences of western imperialism on both indigenous groups and the colonizers themselves. Exoticism is bound up with death and madness as its allure is shadowed by the reality of residing in the stifling atmosphere of the colony. For some of the characters in *Le Vice-consul,* focusing on exoticism is a way of avoiding the truths surrounding imperialism; exoticism becomes a diversion from the harsh reality of what is being destroyed by the colonial system to which they belong and support in one form or another:[3]

> Peter Morgan est assis à l'arrière, il lui dit [à Charles Rossett] que, lorsqu'il voit ce paysage du Delta, il découvre que sa passion de l'Inde est encore plus grande qu'il n'aurait cru (*VC* 177). [...] Elle [Anne-Marie Stretter] s'assied et parle des autres îles, elles sont toutes plus sauvages que celle-ci, elle les nomme, ce sont des îles alluviales recouvertes de forêts, le climat est très malsain. (*VC* 190-91)

Aspects of stifling surroundings abound in *Le Vice-consul,* both in terms of climate but also in terms of the physical and psychic obstacles that separate the ruling class from the horrific everyday realities of India. These restraints and borders further aggravate the situation in which several characters are caught and the outcome is grim, to say the least, for the protagonists of *Le Vice-consul.* The

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[3] In her text *Art and Politics in Duras' "India Cycle"* Lucy Stone McNeece discusses the intersection of subject and Other in Duras's fictional version of exotic India: "In *Le Vice-consul,* Duras exploits the European's fascination with Asia's aura of sensual mystery in order to dramatize the consequences of the West's neocolonial discourse upon its own subjects" (McNeece 49).

intertwined storylines that make up the text showcase the repercussions of being the victim of colonization. These obstacles allow Duras's characters to live out their madness in that they create an atmosphere of abnormality or the necessary setting for madness to fester. In *Le Vice-consul* Anne-Marie Stretter and the beggar woman highlight the ways in which the colonizer resembles the colonized. There are ramifications to be considered for the protagonists on both an individual and a collective level for this text; that is, personal lives are shattered due to being subjected to colonial rule but these individual characters also represent both the colonizer and the colonized on a collective level. For example, once the beggar woman reaches Calcutta after facing many hardships during her difficult journey from her village to her final destination, her affliction is seen on a larger scale as she fades into the collective suffering of Calcutta:[4]

> Après, en route pour dix ans vers Calcutta. […] elle reste, reste là, dans les moussons. Là, à Calcutta, endormie dans la lèpre sous les buissons le long du Gange (*VC* 60). […] Le bord du Gange, les lépreux et des chiens emmêlés font l'enceinte première, large, la première de la ville. Les morts de faim sont plus loin […]. La lumière est crépusculaire, elle ne ressemble à aucune autre. Dans une peine infinie, unité par unité, la ville se réveille. (*VC* 164-65)

As we have already seen, *Un Barrage contre le Pacifique* presents us with a different Durassian colonial setting, one which is also useful as we look to the rewriting of madness and how the protagonists reveal their frustration and/or outrage for the injustices done both to themselves and to the indigenous

[4] In her PhD dissertation, Madeleine Borgomano states that the individual "stories" of fictional characters in *Le Vice-consul* can be seen as the collective story of all: « l'histoire cesse de plus en plus d'être l'histoire de quelqu'un pour devenir l'histoire de tous » (31).

population. By referring to *Un Barrage contre le Pacifique* and making comparisons with *Le Vice-consul,* we can establish how the concept of madness is indeed revisited and rewritten in Duras in two quite different colonial settings. I also consider the concept of trauma and the way in which it contributes to madness. The traumatic impact of colonial life on the vice-consul, the beggar woman and Anne-Marie Stretter can be compared and contrasted as well in order to trace the evolution of madness.

Although the storyline of *Le Ravissement de Lol V. Stein* is not centered around a colonial setting, it remains a pivotal text to provide the thematic threads that Duras will use in later works, one being *Le Vice-consul: "*Whereas *Le Ravissement* depicted mental derangement issuing from the possibility of recapturing a traumatic love affair, *Le Vice-consul* chronicles the madness and death that result from a separation from cultural origins" (McNeece 49). *Le Ravissement de Lol V. Stein* also epitomizes madness as the novel's structure is a spiral into the depths of mental insanity. Several aspects of Lol's life are centred around a circular pattern; for example, Lol wanders around and around the town daily, she repeats the scene at the ball in her mind time and again while trying to re-enact it physically by returning to the rye field again and again. The novel itself represents the entrapment of madness and its repetitive destructive patterns.

Reconstructing Trauma

Absence and grief are at the heart of the madness experienced by the female protagonist in *Le Ravissement de Lol V. Stein.* Lol witnesses the meeting between her fiancé, Michael Richardson, and Anne-Marie Stretter and their departure from the ball. She replays the scene from the ball over and over again in her mind, trying to experience the pain she should have felt that night (if she was a mentally stable person) had the scene been able to play itself out in its entirety:

> [D]ans les multiples aspects du bal de T. Beach, c'est la fin qui retient Lol. C'est l'instant précis de sa fin, quand l'aurore arrive avec une brutalité inouïe et la sépare du couple que formaient Michael Richardson et Anne-Marie Stretter, pour toujours, toujours. Lol progresse chaque jour dans la reconstitution de cet instant. (*RLVS* 46)

Returning to the original scene of trauma calls for an understanding of the processes at play in retrieving memories of one's personal past. In his text examining how individuals remember and deal with psychological trauma, Richard J. McNally describes the multifaceted functions of human memory. For the case of Lol, episodic memory is of interest as it relates to recollecting experiences particular to that individual's life (McNally 30). For example, Lol may have memories of her relationship with Michael Richardson before their split and she may also remember precise elements of the night at the ball: standing « derrière le bar et les plantes vertes » (*RLVS* 19) and watching her fiancé and Anne-Marie Stretter « [qui] étaient partis sur la piste de danse » (*RLVS* 18). McNally points out that "autobiographical recollection is a reconstructive, not a reproductive, process" (35). The event being remembered is comprised of several

components, (for example, the time of day, what one was wearing, etc.) that were encoded in the brain at the time of the original event. Reconstruction therefore entails a process of "gathering up" in the brain all of the elements that contributed to the making of this particular experience (McNally 35). In Lol's case, the process of recollection requires re-fabricating from all its bits and pieces the triangular relationship that existed briefly at the ball in order for her to relive the pain and exclusion.

What form of measurement is used to classify an event as traumatic? Bruce Dohrenwend believes that a clarification is necessary in order to separate the stress of everyday situations from true traumatic stressors: "[N]egative life events are traumatic when they are unpredictable, uncontrollable, […] extremely disruptive of the person's usual activities and extremely disruptive to central life goals" (McNally 97-8). There are three main factors for determining what constitutes a traumatic stressor and they need to be considered in any analysis of Lol's abandonment by Michael Richardson, the event that she incessantly reconstructs throughout the text. It is an event that can be objectively described (Lol and Michael attend the ball together at the South Beach casino, Anne-Marie Stretter enters and spends the remainder of the night dancing with Michael, they leave together at dawn); it is subjected to Lol's personal interpretation (Jacques and Tatiana are chosen to "replace" Michael and Anne-Marie); and Lol's emotional reaction to the event could certainly be considered abnormal (absence of speech, indifference) (variables found in McNally 78). In *La Vie matérielle*

Duras herself comments on Lol's mental instability: « Elle ne souffre pas d'être oubliée, trahie. C'est de cette suppression de la douleur, qu'elle va devenir folle » (32).

Jacques Hold, the narrator, relays Lol's story as a "report" in order to try to make sense of the reasons behind her mental insanity. His narrative revolves around Lol's attempts to recreate this moment of pleasure, loss and desire:

> La femme était seule [...] Michael Richardson se dirigea vers elle [...] Lol, suspendue, attendit, elle aussi. La femme ne refusa pas. [...] Puis, à la fin de la danse qui avait suivi, il n'était pas allé retrouver Lol. Anne-Marie Stretter et Michael Richardson ne s'étaient plus quittés. [...] A ce moment-là une femme d'un certain âge, la mère de Lol, était entrée dans le bal. [...] Lorsque sa mère était arrivée sur Lol et qu'elle l'avait touchée, Lol avait enfin lâché la table. [...] Lol avait crié sans discontinuer des choses sensées : il n'était pas tard, l'heure d'été trompait. [...] Anne-Marie Stretter commença à descendre, et puis, lui, Michael Richardson. Lol les suivit des yeux à travers les jardins. Quand elle ne les vit plus, elle tomba par terre, évanouie. (*RLVS* 18-22)

Jacques's account of Lol centres around the relation he develops with her rather than a depiction of the female protagonist's life story. And Jacques's role in the novel's plot becomes more intense as he falls prey to Lol's madness. He shifts from the non-participatory position of third-person narration to being directly integrated into the storyline dynamics. Through his version of the story of Lol V. Stein, Jacques emphasizes the absence or emptiness that is central to Lol's being: « Ce fut ma première découverte à son propos. Ne rien savoir sur Lol V. Stein était la connaitre déjà. On pouvait, me parut-il, en savoir de moins en moins encore sur Lol V. Stein » (*RLVS* 81). This non-being makes it difficult for outsiders to pinpoint Lol's mental instability and its origins, a fact that gives rise

to speculation about Lol's psychic state. A similar uncertainty will be discussed with regard to the vice-consul's and Anne-Marie Stretter's fragile mental state in *Le Vice-consul* but in *Le Ravissement de Lol V. Stein*, Lol's state of mental instability is the key element of the text.

In *Le Vice-consul,* Duras incorporates a double of Jacques Hold to narrate one of the two tales that intersect to create a complex web of madness: one about the vice-consul of Lahore, and another about the insane beggar woman. Anne-Marie Stretter, the wife of the French Ambassador to Calcutta, and Michael Richard (previously known as Michael Richardson in *Le Ravissement de Lol V. Stein)* are still romantically involved in *Le Vice-consul,* but in rewriting this couple's relationship in this text, Duras does not allude to the affair that started between the two in *Le Ravissement de Lol V. Stein*:

> Avant de connaître Anne-Marie, dit Michael Richard, je l'entendais jouer à Calcutta, le soir, sur le boulevard ; ça m'intriguait beaucoup, je ne savais pas qui elle était, j'étais venu en touriste à Calcutta, […] et puis, un soir, […] je suis entré dans cette pièce où nous étions hier soir. […] elle s'est retournée, elle m'a vu, elle a été surprise, mais je ne crois pas qu'elle ait eu peur, voilà comment je l'ai connue. (*VC* 187)

The Reality of Calcutta

As I already mentioned, the construction of *Le Vice-consul* involves two narrations instead of one. Peter Morgan, one of several British expatriates living at the diplomatic compound in Calcutta, writes the story of the beggar woman, depicting her movement toward a state of madness on her journey to Calcutta after being banished from her village by her own mother. The two tales in the

text, that of the beggar woman's trek, and the French governing body in Calcutta, intersect in the final pages of the novel. The beggar woman makes her way from Calcutta to the island where the infamous *Prince of Wales* hotel stands, a refuge from Calcutta's abject poverty for the French diplomatic population. The hotel grounds are surrounded by wire fencing in order to separate natives from whites and to ensure a peaceful stay for whites. These barricades, appearing harsh and uninviting to an outsider, creates a cocoon-like effect for the colonizers inside. Behind the protective walls they are pampered, they lead a lifestyle which is reminiscent of life at home where they are not reminded of the impoverishment that they have created outside the gates:

> L'île est grande, à l'autre extrémité il y a un village très bas, qui touche la mer. Entre ce village et l'hôtel un grand grillage s'élève et les sépare. Partout, au bord de la mer, dans la mer, d'autres grillages [...]. Ils se retrouvent dans le hall de l'hôtel. [...] Dans le fond il y a un dancing. [...] On commence, à cette heure là, à boire à toutes les tables. [...] De grandes salles à manger blanches donnent sur la mer. [...] Le luxe est profond et éprouvé. (*VC* 177)

The contrast between the overindulgent lifestyle of the colonizers and the poverty and squalor experienced by the majority of Calcutta's residents is emphasized throughout the text. But the luxuries enjoyed by the diplomatic community are tainted by the daily reminder that they are living frivolously at the cost of the colonized population's suffering. For example, Duras refers to the colonizers' lavish surroundings but there is an element of deception in her descriptions, « le luxe de l'ameublement est invoqué mais à fin seule de le provoquer à lever son masque, luxe trompeur des apparences » (Bailey 238). At the hotel on the island

the lobby boasts « des lustres, du creux, du faux or » (*VC* 178). In Anne-Marie's villa there are « les fausses consoles encore, les faux lustres, le creux, le faux or » (*VC* 189). During receptions at the diplomatic compound in Calcutta, the scraps of food are tossed out to the groups of homeless people waiting for their next meal:

> [E]lle [la mendiante], maigreur de Calcutta pendant cette nuit grasse, elle est assise entre les fous, […] elle attend toujours la nourriture. […] Beaucoup de nourriture jetée ce soir derrière les cuisines de l'ambassade de France. (*VC* 149)

The chance face-to-face meeting between Charles Rossett, a young diplomat who has just recently arrived in Calcutta, and the beggar woman on the beach signals the inescapable presence of the colonized and the impossibility of erecting boundaries. Charles Rossett has difficulty coping with the reality of living as part of the colonizing group in Calcutta: «-Si ça devait durer trois ans comme ces premières semaines, dit Charles Rossett, malgré ce que vous en disiez je ne crois pas que je tiendrais le coup… » (*VC* 109). The hotel and its surroundings are perceived as a safe haven for foreigners because it is sealed off from the outside territory still belonging to natives. Feeling secure within the hotel's grounds, Charles Rossett walks along the shore and takes advantage of the cool breeze from the ocean. Charles Rossett's tranquil stroll is a pivotal point in the text as he is chased by the beggar woman who has managed to infiltrate the colony. The colonizer's protected haven is contaminated by the brutal state of agony in which the beggar woman lives. According to McNeece, "the beggar permeates the text at a metaphorical level, providing a shadow play against which the European drama unfolds" (52).

The encounter underlines the fact that the effects of colonialism cannot be swept away nor can the colonizers separate themselves from the harsh realities of imperialism. The limits between colonized India and white India dissolve, agony spills over from both sides and intermingles. Forcibly confronted by the reality of the upheaval caused by his people, Charles Rossett faces his worst nightmare. The beggar woman represents all indigenous people in Calcutta who are impoverished, displaced, mentally fragile and dying due to the dire circumstances they face under colonial rule:

> Le long de la lagune, sur le chemin, derrière lui, des pas précipités, une course de pieds nus. Il se retourne. Il a peur. […] Elle [la mendiante] avance vers lui. Charles Rossett recule, elle avance encore, il recule encore […]. La folie, je ne la supporte pas, c'est plus fort que moi, je ne peux pas…le regard des fous, je ne le supporte pas…tout mais la folie. (*VC* 204-206)

Symptoms of Madness

What constitutes the stages of madness as experienced by Lol, the vice-consul, Anne-Marie Stretter and the beggar woman? What forms of normalized behavior are intermingled with the various symptoms that characterize mental illness, its onset and possible recovery, or more importantly for the majority of the protagonists mentioned above, relapse? How does Duras modify the aetiology of mental insanity and how is it affected by societal constraints from one novel to the next?

According to Laure Adler, biographer of Marguerite Duras, the origins of Lol V. Stein are tied to a real life story of mental instability. Duras's basis for the

character of Lol V. Stein stems from her chance meeting with a female patient at a mental hospital (Adler 248). Lol marries John Bedford, a man she had met only once, perhaps to show the world that she had recovered from the loss of Michael Richardson to another woman. Lol appears to be leading a normal life with a husband and children. Yet a closer look at her life reveals an obsession with appearing normal or appearing to be like everyone else. Lol's preoccupation with keeping the house tidy and running a tight schedule borders on obsessive-compulsiveness. In her home she tries to replicate window displays found at shops and her garden is an identical image of others found throughout the town. She creates an exterior shell that will appease those around her in the class to which she belongs. But why is there this need to be an imposter as opposed to being "herself"? According to Monique Pinthon, Guillaume Kichenin and Jean Cléder, « Sa vie se limite à faire comme les autres pour n'être plus personne, à une mise en scène masquant un vide immense » (120). Lol's identity is synonymous with lack but she creates a facade to mask the absence that characterizes her personality and being. Lol appears to have created an existence based on bourgeois values in order to fit in with expectations of society, but in fact Lol has become petrified in the past, paralyzed at dusk at the ball in Town Beach and unable to move forward because of a crippling desire to relive that night and play it out in its entirety: « Après le bal […] Lol se marie, a trois enfants, […]. Dix ans s'écoulent qui ne comptent pas. Lol n'habite pas le temps,

qui inversement ne la marque pas. Elle est un caillou qui reste là » (Montrelay 18).

Like Lol, Anne-Marie Stretter in *Le Vice-consul* also hides behind the veil of an exemplary existence; in this particular case, the female protagonist masks the dysfunction brought on by the reckless destruction of a colonized group. Madame Stretter poses as a model of the rational colonizer, imitating the expected norm of what the colonizer should represent. In rewriting madness in this text, Duras incorporates a kind of resolution or closure in that the character succumbs to the engulfing tide of madness and takes her own life as she is unable to deal with being caught up in the ongoing harrowing colonial situation.

Lol's madness is further characterized by an absence of speech. Bessel van der Kolk asserts that individuals who experience a traumatic event may not be able to recount or produce a narrative concerning what they went through due to the deep emotional pain associated with that particular experience (qtd. in McNally 135): "The psychiatrist Bessel van der Kolk believes that the emotional intensity of trauma often makes it hard for survivors to piece together a coherent narrative of what happened" (McNally 135).

Through her analysis Murphy has demonstrated that "[a]lienation and absence are at the core of Lol's experience" (Murphy 1982, 96). It is difficult, however, to pinpoint the start of Lol's failure to show emotion or interest since she has apparently always demonstrated a certain lack or non-existence. As articulated by Michèle Montrelay, Lol appears to lead a normal life as wife to

John Bedford and mother of his children, but the connection between her physical appearance and her thoughts and words is missing, leaving the reader with a distorted image. This distorted image of Lol is critical to her presence in Duras's text:

> [Lol] qui n'est jamais tout à fait là, qui n'habite pas vraiment son corps […]. D'un côté, il y a le corps de Lol. De l'autre, il y a la tête : la pensée, les mots, n'importe lesquels, qui l'induisent et la mènent où ils veulent. Le corps, les mots ne font pas nœud, ne font pas cœur. (Montrelay 14)

The true cause behind Lol's madness is never revealed. Her abandonment by Michael Richardson for Anne-Marie Stretter would appear to be the key factor in pushing Lol into her downward spiral, but it cannot be ignored that references to abnormal behaviour prior to the ball at S. Tahla do exist in the text. For example, we learn early on that Lol had always had a tendency to withdraw, had always lacked affect. No one ever really knew the real Lol; for Tatiana Karl, Lol's childhood friend, Lol seemed inaccessible. She suffered from a crisis of identity from early on as « elle avait vécu sa jeunesse comme dans une sollicitation de ce qu'elle serait mais qu'elle n'arrivait pas à devenir » (*RLVS* 80). Her absence of emotion was especially obvious with the passing of her mother, which « la laissa sans une larme » (*RLVS* 32). One questions whether or not these abnormal tendencies existed for quite some time and whether the night at the T. Beach Casino was simply a trigger that caused Lol to withdraw further into a state of instability:

> Au collège [...] il manquait déjà quelque chose à Lol pour être – elle dit: là. Elle donnait l'impression d'endurer dans un ennui tranquille une personne qu'elle se devait de paraître mais dont elle perdait la mémoire à la moindre occasion. [...] Lol V. Stein était jolie, qu'au collège on se la disputait bien qu'elle vous fuît dans les mains comme l'eau parce que le peu que vous reteniez d'elle valait la peine de l'effort. (*RLVS* 12-13)

Dispossession of the Self

The beggar woman in *Le Vice-consul* is subjected to a mixture of harrowing circumstances that are tied in some way to colonialism. Driven from her home by her mother, constant hunger, and pregnancy push her into the depths of madness. Familiar smells reminiscent of her village trigger hallucinations of seeing her parents. The farther she wanders away from her village and family, the more pronounced are her loss of memories and facts about the past (Pinthon, Kichenin, and Cléder 118):

> Elle est à quatre cents kilomètres de Pursat. Un an s'est-il passé depuis l'accouchement ? [...] À Battambang, il y avait une école. Y en avait-il à Battambang ? Elle a oublié. [...] Elle ne retrouvera jamais le chemin. (*VC* 59, 65)

Not only does the beggar woman become distanced from her origins, she is also distancing herself from the essence of her being, from her self.[5] Her journey across India represents a march toward a nothingness, an exploration of « le territoire de l'indifférenciation [et] l'apprentissage de la dépossession de soi » (Carruggi 121). In order to cope with being abandoned the beggar woman must inhibit the flow of memories relating to her past. Noëlle Carruggi asserts that the

[5] This type of repression is at the heart of Lol's insanity in *Le Ravissement de Lol V. Stein* and reappears in the creation of the beggar woman in *Le Vice-consul.*

beggar woman renounces all ties to her origins and does the opposite of what many of her ancestors had done before her time. Instead of migrating across the region with a specific destination or goal in mind, the beggar woman goes blindly toward the unknown:

> Puisqu'elle marche sans regarder devant elle, c'est-à-dire sans rien voir d'autre que la terre où elle pose ses pas, son chemin n'est pas celui de quelqu'un qui avance vers une destination, mais de celui de quelqu'un qui ne sait pas où il se dirige. […] Sa trajectoire ne suit pas le chemin tracé par la coutume de l'antique migration collective. La mendiante tourne le dos à l'histoire, renonce au savoir de son pays. La marche n'est dictée que par la seule nécessite d'avancer […]. (Carruggi 131)

The beggar woman's trek across India to Calcutta represents dispossession in that she is no longer seen as an individual but rather as the face of India's impoverished state and representative of the native population. Her experiences along the route also render her comparable to the country itself under colonial rule as she is raped, forced to beg and prostitute herself in order to survive:

> Un pêcheur est entré dans la carrière, puis un autre. Ils cognent contre l'enfant, ce rat, il faudra bien qu'il sorte. Avec l'argent des pêcheurs, à plusieurs reprises elle va à Pursat, elle achète du riz, le fait cuire dans une boite de conserves […]. (*VC* 23)

The beggar woman's pregnancy and birth of her child is a double burden: her pregnancy would mean another mouth to feed, which would drive the family deeper into poverty. This highlights the hardships endured by the indigenous people under French colonial rule. Banished from her village, the beggar woman has no means to look after her child. She gives the child to a white family, further

destroying any ties to or reminders of her former self and facilitating the rest of her journey toward Calcutta:

> C'est fait : l'enfant a été prise et emmenée dans la villa. […] elle marche moins vite avec ce poids [l'enfant] dans le dos qui tire, étant donné le nombre de ses pauses obligatoires pour assurer sa survie, avec des hommes, aux abords des villages, ses sommeils, ses vols […]. (*VC* 58-59)

Her arrival in Calcutta marks a turning point in the beggar woman's quest to lose her self. Her story, written by Peter Morgan, changes focus from the hardships she faced along her trek to her blending in with the sprawling mass of lepers living near the river: « [L]à, à Calcutta, endormie dans la lèpre sous les buissons le long du Gange » (*VC* 60). Moving from identity to anonymity is an easy transition in Calcutta by intermingling with the group of natives. According to Memmi, this repression of individual identity is characteristic of imperialist oppression: « Autre signe de cette dépersonnalisation du colonisé: ce que l'on pourrait appeler *la marque du pluriel.* Le colonisé n'est jamais caractérisé d'une manière différentielle ; il n'a droit qu'à la noyade dans le collectif anonyme » (104). Ironically it is Peter Morgan's written account of the beggar woman's story that keeps her selfhood somewhat intact. Instead of playing the role of a typical colonizer who tends to see no difference in the number of natives, he becomes her voice that she has silenced.

The beggar woman's descent into madness intensifies as she travels toward Calcutta and she soon finds herself in a position of indifference, of longing no more:

> Elle [la mendiante] serait ainsi passée d'une folie douloureuse, pendant l'errance, à une folie douce, avec l'arrivée à Calcutta. […] L'insensibilité de la mendiante rejoint l'impuissance à souffrir de Lol V. Stein, une zone blanche, une zone d'insensibilité, ce que les psychanalystes appellent « l'asthénie des affects ». (Pinthon, Kichenin, and Cléder 118)

The beggar woman's madness can be compared to that of Lol and to the vice-consul of Lahore. Both Lol and the beggar woman wander aimlessly, either in the streets of S. Tahla or across the country. Both are characterized by an absence of an emotional reaction to a traumatic event which is abnormal according to accepted social norms. The two female characters are also similar in the origin and end result of their state of madness. Both protagonists are brutally torn apart from a love object (for Lol, Michael Richardson and in the case of the beggar woman, her mother) and they are faced with a strong desire to reunite with their respective love object, but this dream will never materialize (Udris 13). Both women are empty shells with no emotion to display despite the trauma they live through. They also find no "cure" for their madness and are left suspended in the realm of unreason. Anne-Marie Stretter also displays some of the same tendencies as she rarely exhibits sadness, notwithstanding her exposure to daily acts of wrongdoing towards indigenous peoples. However, her exposure to the vice-consul and his state of mental instability revives the suppressed thoughts that eventually push her back to the brink of unreason:

> Je [Anne-Marie Stetter] pleure sans raison que je pourrais vous dire, c'est comme une peine qui me traverse, il faut bien que quelqu'un pleure, [...]. [E]lle donne le sentiment d'être maintenant prisonnière d'une douleur trop ancienne pour être encore pleurée. [...] Elle ne va pas jusqu'à la plage, elle s'allonge dans l'allée. [...] [E]lle déplie son bras, elle pose son visage sur ce bras allongé et elle reste là. (*VC* 198-200)

Identity versus Non-Identity

Murphy asserts that little seems to be known as fact about Lol. Jacques "reports" to us, the readers, what he assumes to be true, but throughout the novel there are constant doubts and questions being raised about the authenticity of Lol's story and of the story of those connected to her (Murphy 1982, 99). The reader's uncertainty is sparked by the frequent questioning of stories relayed by Tatiana, speculation about the possible cause of Lol's mental instability, the use of the conditional tense, and Jacques's direct claims of not knowing all of the concrete details of Lol's life:

> Aplanir le terrain, le défoncer, [...] me paraît plus juste, du moment qu'il faut inventer les chaînons qui me manquent dans l'histoire de Lol V. Stein, que de fabriquer des montagnes [...]. Et je crois, connaissant cette femme, qu'elle aurait préféré que je remédie dans ce sens à la pénurie des faits de sa vie. D'ailleurs c'est toujours à partir d'hypothèses non gratuites et qui ont déjà, à mon avis, reçu un début de confirmation, que je le fais. (*RLVS* 37)

This display of dubiousness concerning Lol's past, her motives and mental state all contribute to the aura of absence that surrounds Lol (Udris 59).

Once the family moves to S. Tahla from U. Bridge, Lol begins reliving the events at the ball. It is in S. Tahla that she encounters Jacques Hold, the narrator of Lol's "story". The pivotal role that both Tatiana and Jacques will play

in Lol's universe is alluded to at the first sighting of Tatiana and Jacques together in the street outside of Lol's house. From behind the foliage of her garden, a scene reminiscent of the fateful night at the ball when she stood silently behind a row of plants in the ballroom, Lol repositions herself as a female voyeur, witnessing an intimate kiss between the lovers, which in turn rouses a buried memory of her abandonment at the ball in Town Beach. The text alludes to Lol's possible recognition of the couple, which contributes to the idea of revisiting the past as it leaves the reader wondering if it is Michael Richardson and Anne-Marie Stretter that Lol has seen in the street (Murphy 1982, 98):

> Une fois le parc dépassé ils s'étaient arrêtés. Il avait pris la femme dans ses bras et il l'avait embrassée furtivement très fort. […] Lol, dans son jardin, n'est pas sûre d'avoir reconnu la femme. Des ressemblances flottent autour de ce visage. Autour de cette démarche, du regard aussi. Mais le baiser coupable, délicieux, qu'ils se sont donné en se quittant, surpris par Lol, n'affleure-t-il pas lui aussi un peu à sa mémoire ? (*RLVS* 38)

McNally believes that when an actual event or scenario reminds an individual of the original situation that was encoded into memory, the cues from the current event can facilitate retrieval of memories of what one may have thought to be long-forgotten:

> What we remember sometimes depends on the context of recollection. […] [W]e are more likely to recall something when the context of remembering resembles the context of encoding. This idea is embodied in Endel Tulving and Donald Thomson's (1973) *encoding specificity principle*, which states that information is most accessible when encoding conditions are reinstated at retrieval. (McNally 40)

Lol meets and becomes romantically involved with Jacques Hold, but according to Madeleine Borgomano, Lol does not desire taking Tatiana's place in Jacques' life. She prefers to create a triangulation, one which would mirror that of Michael Richardson, Anne-Marie Stretter and herself had she witnessed the scene of the "ravishing" of Michael Richardson and Anne-Marie Stretter play itself out: « Cet arrachement très ralenti de la robe de Anne-Marie Stretter, cet anéantissement de velours de sa propre personne, Lol n'a jamais réussi à le mener à son terme » (*RLVS* 50). As discussed above, memory recollection can be influenced through recreating the context in which the original event occurred and was stored in the brain through encoding. When a situation mimics the encoding conditions that are a part of the original experience, retrieval and access to these memories are more likely (McNally 40). For Lol, the lovers in the hotel become substitutes for the couple at the ball and are playing their parts in Lol's re-creation of similar circumstances and context of the ball. Murphy reminds us that two meanings of the term *to ravish* are at play in this novel (Murphy 1982, 97). The sexual and seductive ravishing of Michael Richardson by Anne-Marie Stretter parallels Lol's devastation. The loss or "capturing" of her fiancé by another woman sparks in turn her own desire to witness the erotic "ravishing" that takes place between Jacques Hold and Tatiana Karl. In this way, desire circulates within Lol's realm of madness because her resulting mental insanity is characterized by her desire to be a third party in the final act, namely the sexual ravishing. By spending her time lying in the rye field watching Jacques and Tatiana in the hotel

room, she is trying to access an impossible desire, the desire to relive the event but have closure through Tatiana and Jacques.

Just as Lol is presented in *Le Ravissement de Lol V. Stein,* the personality and the past of the vice-consul is questioned in *Le Vice-consul:*

> De quelle pâleur est-il…comme s'il était sous le coup d'une émotion intense mais dont l'expression serait toujours différée, pourquoi ? […] Il est un peu mort, le vice-consul de Lahore…vous ne trouvez pas qu'il est un peu mort ? […] Ne sent-il jamais le regard des autres sur lui ? […] Il a toujours cet air heureux sans que l'on comprenne d'où, de quelle vision, de quelle pensée de bonheur peut lui venir. (*VC* 99-101)

The vice-consul is kept at bay by the majority of the diplomatic community in Calcutta. The many questions that surround the motivation behind his actions in Lahore, coupled with his erratic behavior, support the general consensus that he could be a threat to the French population in the colonized city. The governing body does not outwardly ban his presence; rather, they hide behind the formalities and protocol of the colonial administration to create a barrier between the vice-consul and other colonials. The way in which the vice-consul represents the mothering country (the shooting at Lahore, his obvious fragile mental state, his erratic behaviour) is in sharp contrast with the ideal representation of the colonizer. One of the goals of colonization is to save the uncivil, illogical native from himself, to teach him that reason and logic are the cornerstones of civilized nations:

> Lorsque le colonisateur ajoute, […] que le colonisé est un arriéré pervers, aux instincts mauvais, voleur, un peu sadique, il légitime ainsi sa police et sa juste sévérité. […] On le [le colonisé] dépeint en même temps […] comme une brute qui n'est arrêtée par aucune des inhibitions de la civilisation, etc. Preuve supplémentaire qu'il est inutile de chercher cette cohérence ailleurs que chez le colonisateur lui-même. (Memmi 102-03)

Publicly recognizing and admitting that one of their fellow colonizers possesses the same characteristics of the unpredictable, illogical colonized group would put the European population living in the colony on the same level as the colonized and would open the colonizers up for defeat and emphasize their vulnerability. And defeat is not an option for the colonizer because without the colonized residing in their subordinate position, the colonial situation would not exist: « [L]a simple existence du colonisateur crée l'oppression et seule la liquidation complète de la colonisation permet la libération du colonisé » (Memmi 160). In *Le Vice-consul,* the presence of the white diplomats in Calcutta ensures the continual oppression of the country's native population. But the vice-consul, like the beggar woman, has transgressed social boundaries and therefore becomes a figure of exclusion. Not adhering to the moral code of their respective groups confines both the vice-consul and the beggar woman to being outcast and labeled as abnormal (Udris 107).

The vice-consul's posting in Calcutta is shadowed by the shooting incident during his appointed diplomatic position in Lahore. After shooting at a group of lepers in the Shalimar Gardens in Lahore, the vice-consul is sent to Calcutta where the ambassador has to make a decision on Jean-Marc's next posting.

Lahore thus comes to represent not only a geographical place but is also emblematic of the vice-consul's shooting and his inability to support the colonial situation. Carruggi notes that in Duras's text the vice-consul is often referred to as « l'homme de Lahore » and results in an erasure of the self, thus the vice-consul's identity relies on this single defining action in Lahore:

> [Cette] désignation [marque] le glissement du particulier vers le général; en associant le personnage à un lieu, les périphrases suggèrent que ce n'est pas l'individu en soi qui est important mais son lien avec [la] ville [...] de Lahore. (Carruggi 75)

Mentioning Lahore evokes images of Jean-Marc de H firing upon the lepers and vice versa, the two become inseparable. The identity of Jean-Marc de H. is riveted to Lahore and the betrayal of his fellow French citizens in the colony. They question what to do with the vice-consul in order to protect him from himself and the rest of the administration:

> Pourquoi remonter à l'enfance pour expliquer sa conduite à Lahore? Ne faudrait-il pas chercher aussi à Lahore ?
> -Je préfère qu'on en reste aux conjectures habituelles, qu'on cherche dans l'enfance, dit l'ambassadeur. [...] Les deux hommes cherchent quoi faire de Jean-Marc de H., où l'affecter, dans quel climat, sous quel ciel, afin de le mettre à l'abri de lui-même. (*VC* 42-43)

Threatened by the vice-consul's recurring abnormal behaviour, the white population at the Embassy develops a coping strategy: they try to justify the vice-consul's actions and find a rational answer for any questions that may arise from a review of his dossier (Udris 109): « Charles Rossettt a été invité par l'ambassadeur de France à examiner avec lui le dossier de Jean-Marc de H. [...] En somme rien que de très normal [...] » (*VC* 38-41). At the ambassador's

reception, the vice-consul appears moody, at times absent, laughs inappropriately, stares, bursts into fits of anger: « Le vice-consul a par instants l'air d'être très heureux. Il est comme s'il s'était fou de bonheur, par instants. […] Il est un peu mort, le vice-consul de Lahore…. […] » (*VC* 99-100). The whites try to normalize his behaviour by citing drunkenness, nervousness or a need for attention as reasons behind his abnormal comportment: « Peut-être a-t-il bu (*VC* 119). […] Le vice-consul a un regard difficile à supporter. On dirait qu'il attend de la douceur et peut-être de l'amour » (*VC* 140). Sending him away to occupy another post will not erase his actions in Lahore nor, more importantly, will it eliminate the consequences to be dealt with the colonial administration. The shooting has drawn attention to the very presence of misery in India, a fact that cannot be shelved and forgotten.

Refusing to consider mental instability as a real factor in the vice-consul's case points to a need on the part of the ambassador to turn a blind eye to any hint of the vice-consul's actions being linked to a rejection or refusal of the colonial system. Holding a position of power in the hierarchal structure of the colonial government, the ambassador must suppress any account of defection or possible rebellion by one of his own. The colonial system must strive to uphold a pristine image of order and logic; a diplomat who transgresses the existing power scheme and goes against the ideologies circulated by the colonial administration sends a message of chaos to the outside world: "the character of the Vice-consul indeed represents, for the whites, the major threat of Unreason" (Udris 103). The

ambassador is forcing the colonial administration to conceal the real cause of the vice-consul's madness: his inability to deal with being part of a group that is destroying a country's population and culture. The French diplomatic population in Calcutta chooses to live in blissful ignorance of the horror they are causing through colonization and to pretend not to understand why some colonials are unable to bear living in such a setting: « Les suicides d'Européens pendant la famine qui jamais ne les touche, pourtant, c'est curieux » (*VC* 161). But the division between whites and the colonized in Calcutta is subtly questioned by the Europeans living in the colony throughout the text and it is the vice-consul who permits the white population to be tainted by the very misery in India for which they are responsible (Carruggi 84). The vice-consul's attitude and obvious inability to cope with the pain he as a colonizer is inflicting on the native population cause other diplomats to question the values and ideals they support and defend in the colony:

> Il est clair qu'ils [les colonisateurs] peuvent le [le colonisateur qui se refuse] considérer comme un traître. Il met en question les siens dans leur existence même, il menace toute la patrie métropolitaine, qu'ils prétendent représenter, et qu'en définitive ils représentent en colonie. (Memmi 45)

Faced with the vice-consul's mental fragility, cracks appear in the flawless facade the white population has created for themselves to mask the injustice of colonization. They are « plus dépaysés par le vice-consul que par la famine qui sévit en ce moment sur la côte de Malabar » (*VC* 157). If it were not for the vice-consul, the Europeans in the colony could go on living in denial of the Calcutta that exists outside of the Embassy compound. The French populace prefers to

assuage its guilt with the belief that they are isolated from the immense suffering in India. But the contrast between the overwhelming number of ravenous natives, « les agglomérats de lépreux sur la rive » (*VC* 32) and the small group of French diplomats is extreme in the text.

In the concluding pages of *Un Barrage contre le Pacifique,* the immense gathering of natives outside of the mother's bungalow parallels the massive assembly of Indians outside the gates of the Embassy in *Le Vice-consul.* In *Un Barrage contre le Pacifique* the mother's death is a pivotal factor in the novel in that it sparks a renewed attempt to revolt against the French colonial government. The point of interest here is that one of the colonizer's own lives amongst the colonized and is treated with the same lack of respect and democratic values as the marginalized group:

> Certes, tous les Européens des colonies ne sont pas des potentats, ne jouissent pas de milliers d'hectares et ne dirigent pas des administrations. Beaucoup sont eux-mêmes victimes des maîtres de la colonisation. Ils en sont économiquement exploités, politiquement utilisés, en vue de défendre des intérêts qui ne coïncident pas souvent avec les leurs. (Memmi 36)

Her passing is not seen as an end to the struggle of the colonized living on the plains. It is in fact a catalyst that prompts the natives to keep moving forward with their refusal of the colonial system and their reclaiming of their land and rights even if they have to resort to violence:

> -Ils [les agents] vont reprendre la concession, dit un homme. Il faudrait que vous laissiez un fusil.
> -[…] Il faut que vous portiez leurs corps dans la forêt […]. Noyez leur auto, loin, dans le rac. […]Que jamais aucun de vous ne s'accuse. Ou alors que tous s'accusent. Si vous êtes mille à l'avoir fait ensemble ils ne pourront rien contre vous. (*BCP* 362-63)

The vice-consul's madness can be traced to his view of himself as a contributing member of the colonial community. He is driven to insanity and shooting at the lepers in the gardens of Shalimar because he can no longer stand being trapped by the colonial facade of creating a more civil society in India. He has become the conscience of the dominant group and the weight is too much to bear. Duhamel and Mavrikakis assert that « ce que propose le personnage du vice-consul, c'est la catastrophe pour briser la catastrophe » (28). As seen in Duras's treatment of the mother-child relationship and the family, in her fictional world, madness leads to violence. In the Durassian world, insanity may stem from a feeling of entrapment and helplessness. The scene where the vice-consul breaks the mirror in his residence speaks volumes about his ultimate rejection of colonization. He can no longer deal with seeing the image of an usurper; he is betraying his own beliefs by loyally serving the best interests of the colonizer. Shattering the mirror while gazing at his own image is a metaphorical suicide. Shooting at the lepers in the Shalimar gardens did not end the suffering because the scale of misery is colossal in India and the grip of the mother country's power is an insurmountable force. The suffering that the vice-consul has internalized and the role he has played in the ongoing affliction devour him.

Retry, Repeat, Reveal

The idea of reliving an event that is associated with evoking madness is the key to attempting to piece together Duras's creation of Lol and the vice-consul. For Lol returning to Town Beach is her showdown with an incomplete past that is linked to her state of insanity. When Jacques Hold escorts Lol to the Town Beach casino, this return to the original scene of the ball illustrates her effort to access her memory of that fateful night (Tomiche 267). By revisiting the scene, Lol hopes to be a part of the triangulation originally represented by herself, Michael Richardson, Anne-Marie Stretter, but instead it is a failed attempt to repeat the past turn of events. A successful return would reveal the heart of Lol's desire: to witness the encounter between Anne-Marie Stretter and Michael Richardson after their departure from the ball:

> Lol regardait. Derrière elle j'essayais d'accorder de si près mon regard au sien que j'ai commencé à me souvenir, à chaque seconde davantage, de son souvenir. […] Un couple d'amants est arrivé sur elle, bolide lent, […]. Un crépitement d'accidents secondaires, des cris de mère, se produisent. La vaste et sombre prairie de l'aurore arrive. Un calme monumental recouvre tout, engloutit tout. Une trace subsiste, une. Seule, ineffaçable, on ne sait pas où d'abord. Mais quoi ? ne le sait-on pas? Aucune trace, aucune, tout a été enseveli, Lol avec le tout. (*RLVS* 180-81)

We know that Lol's venture founders since at the end of the text, she returns to the rye field once again, trying to gain access to the past through Jacques and Tatiana and continuing to live in a state of « l'éternité du bal dans le cinéma de Lol V. Stein » (*RLVS* 49).

The concept of *le regard* is crucial to articulating the link between madness and the reliving the ball at Town Beach since it is the visual that impedes language for Lol at the ball. As explained earlier, Lol's mental instability is characterized by an absence of speech. According to Lucy Stone McNeece, Lol's elective mutism correlates with her inability to witness the turn of events between Michael Richardson and Anne-Marie Stretter after leaving the ball at dawn: "Her [Lol's] loss of sight at the moment of the lovers' departure coincided with a sudden loss of language" (McNeece 30). Lol has no control over the couple's departure because she cannot produce the crucial words that would change the course of events and would keep Lol's relationship intact with Michael (McNeece 30). But years later Lol does attempt to manipulate the relationship between Tatiana and Jacques, substitutes for Michael and Anne-Marie, in order to gain access to her unyielding desire to be a part of the triangulation. Lol is the subject in relation to the gaze which concretizes her position of dominance as the novel progresses. *Le regard* is an essential motif that is often woven throughout the Durassian corpus and relates to female status as either active or passive in relation to the traditional patriarchal view. Lol is originally the subject of Jacques Hold's narration but as he becomes involved directly with Lol, his position of control as narrator is weakened as he is tangled in her web of insanity. Lol uses voyeurism as a tactic to gain access to the triangulation with Tatiana and Jacques and thus attempt to gain control over a re-union with the lost love object:

> De loin, avec des doigts de fée, le souvenir d'une certaine mémoire passe. Elle frôle Lol peu après qu'elle s'est allongée dans le champ, […]. Et peut-être Lol a-t-elle peur, mais si peu, de l'éventualité d'une séparation encore plus grande d'avec les autres. (*RLVS 63)*

Like Lol, the vice-consul revisits surroundings that are reminiscent of his stay in Lahore. This original scene in Lahore is linked to a failure to find closure and his ensuing insanity. For example, he immerses himself in the sea of lepers flooding the riverbanks in Calcutta: « [I]l commence à marcher le long du Gange entre les lépreux » (*VC* 150). He invites interaction with the colonized instead of abhorring them. The scene at the ambassador's reception is the vice-consul's version of attempting to relive or reconnect with Lahore. The adjoining rooms where the gathering is held are compared to « celles d'un casino d'été » (*VC* 93), providing a cue to the reader to re-imagine the scene of the ball at Town Beach, the site of obsession for Lol V. Stein. The connection made with Anne-Marie Stretter solidifies his feelings of shame and rage associated with being a perpetrator for colonization, the root of his mental insanity. She understands that his thoughts are monopolized by the key event in Lahore that is now so much a part of his identity.

The reception scene in *Le Vice-consul* differs from Lol's case in *Le Ravissement de Lol V. Stein* in that the vice-consul does not try to physically re-enact the shooting at Lahore, whereas Lol does try to re-play the original scene of loss each time by lying in the rye field to watch Jacques and Tatiana. Nor does he return to the site of his mental breakdown. If it replays in his mind and haunts

him, there is no closure because French colonial India persists. With her creation of Lol and Jean-Marc de H., Duras has differing symptoms of mental insanity while the foundation remains the same: a state of unreason persists, as one can see with several other characters throughout the Durassian corpus.

Paradox and Anne-Marie Stretter

One of the dominant figures at the centre of ruined social order in Calcutta is Anne-Marie Stretter. Anne-Marie's position in society is ambivalent in that she fulfills her duties related to protocol as the French Ambassador's wife but at the same time is sensitive to and deeply disturbed by the misery inflicted on the native population of the country due to colonization:

> Anne-Marie Stretter va dans les dépendances, elle répète que les restes doivent être donnés aux affamés de Calcutta, elle dit qu'une bassine d'eau fraîche doit être mise désormais chaque jour devant la grille des cuisines à côté des restes parce que la mousson d'été commence et qu'ils doivent boire. (*VC* 36)

Her two roles are in conflict as she obediently fulfills the responsibilities of her position in the upper echelon of the white dominant class, for example, welcoming newcomers from the mother country to the governing class and playing host to dignitaries at lavish receptions where she is obliged to observe « le rituel méprisé » (*VC* 93). She is not only respected by her peers but she is also depicted as a woman towards whom others are magnetically drawn. They see in Madame Stretter a woman who embodies charm and empathy and who is an upholder of the traditions of upper society decorum. The opulent parties thrown at

her residence allow those in her circle to escape into a world where the hardships of India, created by their very presence in the first place, are temporarily nonexistent (Murphy 1982, 105).

Anne-Marie Stretter's magnetism extends beyond people's desire to be in the presence of a woman possessing a mysterious aura of warmth yet distance, of sensitivity yet indifference. Anne-Marie is the object of sexual attraction and desire for many white men in the colony. For Anne-Marie Stretter, the involvement in numerous love affairs does not reflect the typical ennui associated with other white women who, having dutifully accompanied their husbands, feel trapped in colonies. Many Europeans flocked to the colonies in order to be a part of the mother country's successful hold over and transformation of a Third World country. Marie-Paul Ha asserts that many colonial wives had no daily purpose to serve in the household as the chores and cooking were allotted to native servants (116) : « Les femmes, pour la plupart, ont la peau blanche des recluses. Elles vivent volets clos à l'abri du soleil-qui-tue, elles ne font presque rien aux Indes, elles sont reposées, elles sont regardées [...] » (*VC* 100). Nor is Anne-Marie's promiscuity a sign of a stereotypical passive female who is taken advantage of by sexually deprived white men seeking sexual satisfaction amongst the limited white female population in the colony. Her apparent boredom is more a signal of lost hope given that she has internalized the suffering caused by the colonizing group with whom she is affiliated. Her silence and daily efforts to help a few citizens of the starving population in Calcutta is her way of distancing herself

from the diplomatic community. Her actions and absence of speech are also a sign of the greater need to recognize the damage done to the occupied country's population and culture:

> […] the atmosphere of indolence that surrounds Madame Stretter, instead of signifying the ease and luxury of colonial power, suggests oppression and the weight of society's impotence. Her languid silence, traditionally associated with female passivity and helplessness, begins to signify indifference and disdain for the elaborate staging of colonial power. (McNeece 59)

Although the signs of Anne-Marie's contempt for colonial rule are manifested in negative ways such as repeated withdrawal into her own world in the presence of others, elective mutism, depression and overt sadness (all of which will be discussed in detail in terms of presentation in the novel), they point toward a positive reinforcement of acknowledging the damage being done to the colonized group. For example, Ha also points out the importance of creating a comfortable household in the colony, one that is reminiscent of the *métropole*. Anne-Marie does quite the opposite in the novel, keeping the spaces that she frequents in the diplomatic residence and at her villa practically empty. This minimalist decor reflects both her rejection of fostering ties to a city at the mercy of the colonial system and at the same time her refusal to be reminded of her home country that so ruthlessly tears apart and dominates populations considered to be on the periphery of society. In this way, it can also be interpreted as a rejection of origins, leaving Mme Stretter to wander aimlessly with no sense of a connection to the past, forced to forget like the beggar woman. She cannot enjoy

the lifestyle available to her because of her elevated status in the colony. The colonizer's status comes at a price, that being the destruction of another culture and society.

Raynalle Udris believes that this manifestation of "lack" in Anne-Marie's dwelling is metaphorical of her link to the indigenous people (141). The native population is outwardly suffering from a lack of everything from food to respect whereas Madame Stretter suffers from an inability to directly affect the horrendous situation in Calcutta. Ninette Bailey explains that the image of the hand in this text, which she sees as signifying powerlessness, links Anne-Marie to the colonized (Bailey 236). They are forced to slave in the rice paddies, « de chaque côté d'eux pendent leurs outils de chair nue » (*VC* 176), working solely to benefit the mother country. While traveling through the countryside, Anne-Marie is physically shielded from the natives' suffering in the fields on either side in that she is leisurely traveling to her villa « dans la Lancia noire » (*VC* 175), surrounded by her lovers. The evident status symbols (the luxury car, not having to do manual labour to eke out a living, keeping company with fellow white diplomats) are in direct contrast with the impoverished lifestyle of the colonized:

> Ils roulent entre les rizières […]. Anne-Marie Stretter s'est endormie sur l'épaule de Michael Richard […]. Sur les talus, partout, s'égrènent, en files indiennes, des chapelets de gens aux mains nues. […] Des gens marchent, ils portent des sacs, des bidons, des enfants […]. Il [Charles Rossett] prend sa main [d'Anne-Marie Stretter] et l'embrasse longuement. […] Mille sur les talus, ils transportent, posent, repartent les mains vides, gens autour de l'eau vide des rizières […]. Fatigue. (je souligne). (*VC* 175-76)

Even so the unjust hardships that are borne by the natives have had an adverse effect on her mental state. « [S]a main […] posée » (*VC* 175) or inactive in the car is indicative of her incapability to bring about positive change for the indigenous population. The elevated position she holds in the colonizing group, being a part of the inner governmental circle, is nothing more than a facade and like the native people, her hands are tied and she is forced into simply desiring change as opposed to bringing about change.

Like Lol in *Le Ravissement de Lol V. Stein*, on the surface Madame Stretter appears to be leading a harmonious life as mother and wife. But one does not have to dig very deep to find speculation about Anne-Marie's daily activities. In both *Le Vice-consul* and *Le Ravissement de Lol V. Stein,* the reader senses that the narrator is incorporating opinions and questions from a conjectural group, in this case the rest of colonial white society that surrounds Anne-Marie at the Embassy compound. The text is peppered with the use of question marks and the conditional tense, both of which point to speculation on the part of the narrator and the governing circle:

> Elle intrigue, la femme de Calcutta. Personne ne sait très bien à quoi elle occupe son temps […]. Depuis l'heure du tennis et celle de la promenade, que ferait-elle d'autre, chez elle, enfermée ? […] Avec ses filles qui lui ressemblent, elle passe des heures chaque jour, on le dirait. […] Anne-Marie Stretter s'occupe beaucoup de l'éducation de ses filles. […] Le matin, elles passent toutes les trois en short blanc à travers les jardins de l'ambassade, et encore et tous les matins à travers ces jardins elles vont au tennis ou elles se promènent. (*VC* 93-94)

The facade of order and contentment that Madame Stretter projects to the rest of the community wins her the label of "representative of occidental logic" (Udris 128). Her bourgeois upbringing lends support to this present status as a keeper of western values and ideals. Ironically, she is viewed as an asset for the colonialist ruling class because of her seeming ability to balance compassion and realism. Her charitable gestures towards the starving and leprosy-stricken native population combined with her ability to uphold the rules of decorum at the Embassy contribute to the air of seduction that surrounds this complex character. The irony lies in the external appearance of her acceptance of France's hegemonic position in India but internally her rejection of imperialist rule and the void left by her inability to substantially affect the native population's wretched state are at the root of her unreason and melancholy. Madame Stretter describes living in Calcutta as a non-existence: « [c]e n'est ni facile ni difficile, ce n'est rien » (*VC* 109). In the opinion of Memmi, for the colonizer who rejects colonialism, the impossibility lies in the fact that the colonizer cannot deny his or her citizenship or ties to the mother country:

> Les relations coloniales ne relèvent pas de la bonne volonté ou du geste individuel; elles existaient avant son arrivée ou sa naissance; qu'il les accepte ou les refuse ne les changera pas profondément; [...]. Il aura beau se rassurer : « J'ai toujours été ceci ou cela avec les colonisés », il soupçonne, ne serait-il aucunement coupable comme individu, qu'il participe d'une responsabilité collective, en tant que membre d'un groupe national oppresseur. (Memmi 61)

The other members of the colonial circle attempt to rationalize, create or find explanations for any abnormal behavior that may be displayed by Anne-

Marie, the « femme de Calcutta » (*VC* 93). The ambassador's wife is a prominent figure in the diplomatic community and her public persona represents all that is realistic and tolerant. Any deviation from this norm is perceived as dangerous for the colonizing group as madness and unreason are typically associated with the colonized.

As mentioned above, Anne-Marie's alluring qualities extend beyond that of being able to attract the approval of the general diplomatic faction in Calcutta; she seduces several men who either frequent or work within the Embassy. A well-known secret amongst her inner circle is that she frequently travels with her lovers to her villa on the island to escape the blatant misery present in the city. One of her tools of seduction is her piano playing. Perhaps her most noteworthy suitor in this text (connected to the aspect of rewriting) is Michael Richard. Despite her circle of male admirers, Madame Stretter remains in a state of unfulfillment. As in Lol's case, madness here is a symptom of incompleteness. For Lol, betrayal and extinguishing the promise of an intended marriage to Michael Richardson are connected to her abnormal behavior and depression. Duras carries this thread of incompleteness tied to madness through to Anne-Marie Stretter, the woman at the heart of Lol's unattained future. In *Le Vice-consul,* a text that chronologically "follows" *Le Ravissement de Lol V. Stein,* Madame Stretter is still romantically involved with Michael Richard, but he cannot bring a sense of fulfillment to Anne-Marie.

One of Duras's stylistic devices in *Le Vice-consul* and *Le Ravissement de Lol V. Stein* is to link silence with sorrow. In the case of Anne-Marie Stretter in *Le Vice-consul,* silence is connected to hopelessness, melancholy and the void that ensues: "Durassian melancholy inscribes silence in the text, reduces the message of discourse to the conclusion that there is nothing to say [...]" (Broden 99).

Both Lol and Anne-Marie manifest their lack through speech patterns that include many unfinished sentences and long periods of silence in the company of others. In the opinion of Udris, "For the Durassian being who enters unreason, language, the instrument of Logos, loses its relevance [...]" (134). Lol invites guests to a dinner party at her house and the evening is marked by the guests' painful attempts to generate conversation with Lol and in doing so, they carefully weigh their words, avoiding questions that may upset Lol:

> Le dîner est relativement silencieux. Lol ne fait aucun effort pour qu'il le soit moins, peut-être ne le remarque-t-elle pas. [...] La conversation, par échappées, se généralise. On pose des questions à la maîtresse de maison. [...] On est un peu plus aimable avec elle qu'il ne faudrait, que le propos ou ses réponses ne le réclament. Dans cette douce amabilité – observée également par son mari – je vois le signe de l'inquiétude passée et à venir, constante, dans laquelle doivent vivre tous ses proches. (*RLVS* 141-43)

By opting to remain silent, both women do not conceal their mental instability which stems from either an intense period of suffering (Anne-Marie's stay in the colony) or a traumatic incident (Lol's fiancé leaving her for another woman). Rather, they highlight the absence at the heart of their emotional fragility. Carruggi points out that Anne-Marie's withdrawal from those around her is especially prominent during her trip to the island with her lovers:

> Dans *Le Vice-consul* c'est à l'hôtel du Prince of Wales que l'on voit Anne-Marie Stretter glisser dans la dimension de l'absence. Elle aussi est « en voyage », partie dans un univers auquel n'ont pas accès ses admirateurs […]. (Carruggi 114)

Anne-Marie's detachment is evident to her lovers and affects her physical being and the way in which these men typically view her – as elegant and beautiful: « On reste là, auprès d'elle, près. Le silence se fait […]. Ils la regardent. Elle est maigre sous le peignoir noir, elle serre les paupières, sa beauté a disparu » (*VC* 195).

Outcasts or Outpatients?

Although *Le Vice-consul* is at first broken down into two seemingly separate storylines, the theme of madness runs through and ultimately connects the distinct "stories" of the vice-consul and the beggar woman. The text depends on the diplomatic group's speculation about the vice-consul's mental illness and the beggar woman's descent into madness on her trek toward Calcutta. But how does one decide if an individual is mentally ill or is simply perceived by others as emotionally unstable? Both the vice-consul and the beggar woman in *Le Vice-consul* find themselves alienated from the rest of society because they are labeled as mentally insane and therefore feared. For the white population of Calcutta, fearing madness is linked to fearing contamination of the hierarchal structure they have erected through imperialist measures. This idea of being contaminated by the individual's mental insanity is sometimes linked in the text to having a physical

contact with the person.[6] For example, Charles Rossett successfully escapes the beggar woman's touch near the *Prince of Wales* hotel: « [E]lle [la mendiante] avance plus vite que lui et Charles Rossett jette la monnaie par terre, se retourne et fuit vers le chemin en courant. […] Voici, vite, le *Prince of Wales,* ses grillages, sa palmeraie interdite à elle » (*VC* 206).

The fear of contamination in the text may also be related to the worry of being emotionally affected by an individual's despair. Peter Morgan, the "creator" of the beggar woman's story, is afraid to face her madness which would play out on the pages of the text he is writing, so he decides to abandon the writing before the beggar woman's despair spirals out of control toward mental instability:

> Peter Morgan parle du livre qu'il est en train d'écrire (*VC* 179). […]
> [George Crawn dit :] –Comment la [la mendiante] retrouver dans le passé ? rassembler même sa folie? séparer sa folie de la folie, […] le mot Battambang…du mot Battambang ? […]
> -Je l'abandonnerai avant la folie, dit Peter Morgan, ça c'est sûr […]. (*VC* 183)

Murphy discusses how despair is orally expressed by both the beggar woman and the vice-consul, either through screaming for the vice-consul or song and/or verbal repetition for the beggar woman (Murphy 1982, 107): « [U]n chant s'élève tout à coup, assez loin [….]. Michael Richard reconnaît la voix. –C'est cette femme de Savannakhet, dit-il […] » (*VC* 199). Upon hearing the beggar woman's song on the island, Anne-Marie Stretter decides she can no longer go on

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[6] In *L'Amant* the narrator talks about being chased by the beggar woman and the terror of being caught. The narrator feared that if she were physically touched by the beggar woman she would end up in a similar state of mental instability: « [J]e suis sûre que derrière moi quelqu'un court dans mon sillage. […] Je la reconnais, c'est la folle du poste, la folle de Vinhlong. […] [S]i la femme me touche, même légèrement, de la main, je passerai à mon tour dans un état bien pire que celui de la mort, l'état de la folie » (*A* 103-4).

living, leaves her villa and lies down on the beach to die. During the beggar woman's journey across India, she obsessively repeats the name of her village Battambang. By constantly restating the name of the place which represents her disconnect with the past and the loss of her selfhood, the beggar woman is unable to let go of the source of her despair, which ultimately hinders the process of emotional healing.

For the vice-consul his wailing at night on his balcony and at the reception held by Anne-Marie Stretter and her husband is a manifestation of his despair: « Quand il [le vice-consul] criait on pensait à Lahore…de son balcon, la nuit, il criait » (*VC* 158). The circle of people frequented by the vice-consul labels madness as a taboo. The speculation surrounding why the vice-consul left Lahore as well as his questionable behaviour allows the reader to witness the social stigma attached to mental illness. He is watched, scrutinized, questioned about his past and openly excluded in society. Pinthon, Kichenin and Cléder assert that we can only hypothesize about the mental instability of the vice-consul, as the characters do throughout the novel: « La folie du vice-consul ne sera pas affirmée mais demeurera une hypothèse, formulée au cours de la soirée à l'ambassade » (116):

> -J'aurais cru, à voir son air avant qu'il [le vice-consul] ne parle, qu'il avait dans les yeux…qu'il regardait quelque chose qui était perdu, [….] –le malheur fait cet effet, tu ne crois pas ? […] –N'est-il pas fou cet homme, tout simplement fou ? (*VC* 155-158)

Spaces and Seasons

It goes without question that Duras's repeated use of settings that signify enclosure and suffocation play a strategic role in enveloping the characters in an imaginative setting that is crucial to the reader's perception of the thematic thread of madness that readers experience. The tropical, isolated environment in *Un Barrage contre le Pacifique* evokes a feeling of being stuck in a dangerous no man's land: « Dès que le soleil disparaissait derrière la montagne, les paysans allumaient des feux de bois vert pour se protéger des fauves » (*BCP* 32). The plain's inhabitants may reap the benefits of the forest as a source of food, but the same environment is also home to deadly wildcats and poisonous fruit. « [L]es enfants aux bouches roses toujours ouvertes sur leur faim » (*BCP* 33) die from malnourishment or « du choléra que donne la mangue verte » (*BCP* 118). These surroundings, coupled with the frequent mention of the monsoon season, add to the already bleak picture of living under colonial authority.

Unlike Suzanne, Joseph and their mother, the fictional characters representing the colonizer in *Le Vice-consul* are able to choose to avoid the harrowing scenes of destruction brought about by colonialism. The majority of them go about their daily business within the diplomatic compound that is totally surrounded by high walls and gates that keep the native population at bay. The idea of a gated community in this text allows the colonizer to exist as s/he does at home in the mother country and to ignore the consequences of imperialist practice. But the stifling heat knows no boundaries and is often referenced

throughout the text in relation to how one is "holding up" or coping in the colony. As Thomas Broden remarks, the punishing climate that returns time and again to Duras's texts "stifles action, strains relationships, and provokes inertia and boredom" (93). [7] In this Durassian narrative, the hot climate is linked to the onset of madness.

It is interesting to note that Anne-Marie Stretter is first presented as unfettered by the overbearing heat in Calcutta. Unlike other white colonial women in India « [qui] ont la peau blanche de recluses [et qui] vivent volets clos à l'abri du soleil-qui-tue » (*VC* 100), Anne-Marie dares to venture outdoors in order to feed the starving, dressed in « short blanc, bras nus » (*VC* 36) symbolizing a sort of angelic presence helping out the impoverished in Calcutta. She is unperturbed by the climate that paralyzes so many because she has become exhausted by the atrocities in Calcutta, but her unwavering presence and lack of fragility dwindle as she opens herself up to contamination by the vice-consul's madness. Jean-Marc de H. and Madame Stretter share an unspoken bond in that they both have internalized the negative effects of colonization but manifest it in different manners: the vice-consul turns to violence while Anne-Marie retreats into a state of melancholy. The scene at the reception proves that they understand each other's position, yet for Anne-Marie, exposure to the vice-consul's state of

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[7] In *Les Petits Chevaux de Tarquinia* numerous references to the unbearable heat at the Italian seaside town are bound up with the overriding themes of dissatisfaction, boredom, and emptiness in terms of romantic relationships:

> [Sara à Jacques:] - Je ne peux pas supporter la chaleur. […] Il hésita un peu.
> -C'est rien de neuf, dit-il. Tu en as marre de moi.
> Il se mit à rire. Elle rit avec lui.
> -Comme moi de toi, ajouta-t-il. On n'y peut rien. (*PCT* 68-70)

unreason unfortunately leads to a downward spiral into insanity. Her reaction to the harsh climate corresponds to her fall into the depths of despair. Even at her villa on the islands that represents the ultimate escape from being subjected to the daily hardships endured by the starving lepers outside of the diplomatic compound, the heat creeps up on Madame Stretter and her group of male companions: « La chaleur est redevenue celle de Calcutta. L'air est une vapeur salée et âcre ici » (*VC* 185). Her detachment becomes more pronounced and she allows her sadness to be seen by her lovers: « Qu'il fait chaud cette nuit ! dit-elle, […]. Elle est maigre sous le peignoir noir, elle serre les paupières, sa beauté a disparu. Dans quel insupportable bien-être se trouve-t-elle ? » (*V-C* 195-6).

Charles Rossett, who comes face to face with the beggar woman near Anne-Marie's villa, the so-called safe zone for whites, openly discusses his uneasiness and boredom in the colony and his inability to adapt to the suffocating climate:

> [Un homme à la réception] -C'est difficile, évidemment, mais quoi pour vous, précisément?
> -La chaleur, dit Charles Rossett, bien sûr, mais aussi cette monotonie, cette lumière, il n'y a aucune couleur, et à la fin, je ne sais pas si je vais m'habituer. (*VC* 101)

These references are peppered throughout the novel and foreshadow that he will be the sacrificial lamb, the newcomer to the colony, confronted by the figure that epitomizes colonization: the beggar woman.

In order to validate his position as colonizer, Rossett complains about the living conditions in the colony and shows that he is adjusting poorly not only to

going abroad in service of the mother country but on a personal level, that he is eaten up by the guilt associated with colonial oppression as well :

> Tantôt il insiste sur les difficultés de son existence exotique, les traîtrises d'un climat sournois, la fréquence des maladies, […] la méfiance des populations hostiles […]. Au fond de lui-même, le colonialiste plaide coupable. (Memmi 78)

Lol's house also conjures images of a corseted lifestyle that attempts to create an image of a safe zone for the white bourgeois community in that it depicts an environment fit for a woman who has returned to normal after a period of mental insanity. A close look at Lol's immaculate, orderly home shows that it is quite the opposite. It unveils a void that she cannot fill with her own personality and imagination. She exists in the past as her mind is set on replaying the scene at the ball and gaining some form of closure. She mimics images of perfection and she cannot stray from her rigid scheduling as this is one aspect of her life where she has control over the end result. Her home reflects her abnormal functioning, the exact opposite of what she is trying to portray: « Un ordre rigoureux régnait dans la maison de Lol à U. Bridge. […] Les heures étaient respectées. Les emplacements de toutes choses, également » (*RLVS* 33).

To summarize, both *Le Ravissement de Lol V. Stein* and *Le Vice-consul* display the essential themes which often circulate throughout Duras's fictional world: abandonment and loss, trauma, and unstable identities. The setting (physical, cultural, and social) and the fictional characters that interact with Durassian protagonists within this setting play a role in determining what is perceived as normal behaviour after experiencing loss or being exposed to a

traumatic event. Both Lol in *Le Ravissement de Lol V. Stein* and the vice-consul in *Le Vice-consul* repeatedly attempt to "return" to an original scene of loss. In doing so, they both manifest abnormal behaviour or symptoms typically associated with mental instability. The boundaries set by the expectations of the society in which each fictional character "lives" have a profound effect on selfhood, either by destabilizing identities or contributing to the erasure of self.

In *Le Ravissement de Lol V. Stein,* the very structure of the narrative itself reflects Lol's madness and her circular patterns representing her recurring attempts to return to the night of the ball (for example, Lol returns time and again to the rye field in order to watch Jacques and Tatiana, she runs aimlessly around town, trying each time to reconstruct in her mind the events at the ball). According to Borgomano, « [r]ejouer le moment du "ravissement", reconstituer une mémoire de l'oubli, pourrait ressembler à une cure et conduire à une guérison » (Borgomano 1997, 79). However, at the end of the text, the reader is left to wonder if Lol's mental condition will ever improve (recalling the absence of closure in many of Duras's texts) or if she will forever relive the fateful night at the ball. Like Duras and her fictional writing, « Lol continue à vouloir que tout recommence » (Borgomano 1997, 79).

The storyline presented in *Le Vice-consul* is also centred around a re-creation of the past. Like Lol's case, the re-constitution of the vice-consul's past and a search for explanations for his dysfunctional behaviour parallel his descent into madness. In this text, however, the social also interacts with the political,

creating a stifling environment where madness thrives both individually and collectively. The restraints and borders in this setting help the reader to comprehend madness not only on an individual level but also the way in which madness relates to the whole social structure presented by Duras.

Confession and Invention: Autobiographical Aspects Recast

> There is, on the one hand, the life Marguerite Duras lived, and, on the other, the one she recounted. How is it possible to untangle fact from fiction, from lies? As the years went by she wanted through writing to recreate her life and to make the biography her own (5).
>
> -Laure Adler

In both *L'Amant* and *L'Amant de la Chine du Nord* Duras works concurrently, at one and the same time writing through and against the autobiography genre. She uses a dichotomous technique of interspersing fiction with fact in these two texts, which are exemplary of a morphing of different genres that straddle literary categories. Duras does not seek to re-present a past that stays "true" to its every detail, often a crucial concern of classical autobiography. Instead her writing is a *mélange* of what is remembered and the way in which "memory" is re-lived in the present. The Durassian text represents "the creation of a psychological place that transcends time and geography" (Roberts 53); it is where the personal, social and historical converge. Through her fragmented yet poetic portrayal of a girl's transition from dependency to individuality, a portrait that is autobiographically based, Duras portrays her self-image in the present act of writing. She scrutinizes herself through her family's and her lover's opinions, as well as the general attitudes and values of the outer world (colonial society).

Questions of time, space and identity within the framework of autobiographical fiction form the basis of an examination of the ways in which Duras re-works, through the form of the female protagonist and the narrative voice in the present moment of writing, what she describes as her own identity as a young girl growing up in Indochina from 1914 to 1933.[1] The private and public, inside and outside converge and demonstrate how the colonial backdrop "is re-presented/represented in Duras as a personal familial or sexual power struggle" (Ramsay 1996, 53). In her fictional works Duras explores her past and present resistance to cultural and social norms that shaped her adolescence. What occurs in Duras is a splitting of the subject: the heroine in these texts, who "represents" the author's adolescence, is both female and a lower class white colonizer defying the rules of colonial society. Suzanne Chester asserts that "the factors of gender and class produce a split in the colonial writing subject that challenges the fixed oppositions between subject and object" (437). How do colonial society, the family home representing familial authority, and the lover's apartment all contribute to the formation of the female protagonist's identity? Memory and fiction combine and the result is a literary creation which Duras presents as a true representation of a young Marguerite crossing the Mekong and embarking on a journey that will help to solidify her individuality. The spaces and the fictional

[1] Duras's *oeuvre* is often marked by a confusion between the protagonist's and the narrator's voice, both of which are manipulated by the author. The reader often questions who is speaking - the female protagonist, the narrator, or the author? This destabilization of identity parallels feminist thought on women writers and the way in which female authors break the mould set for them by patriarchal discourse. As Leah D. Hewitt articulates: "In her version of feminine/feminist autobiography, Duras unveils the feminine as a dynamic, perverse force that calls into question, from within the traditional system of representation, the oppositions active/passive, subject/object, that have been used to assert gender/sexual difference as hierarchy" (98).

characters that inhabit them or are associated with them all contribute to the formation of the protagonist's identity that is manifested through writing in the here and now.

Traditional and "New" Autobiography

In *The French New Autobiographies: Sarraute, Duras and Robbe-Grillet,* Raylene Ramsay proposes an examination of the new conceptions of self that arise in contemporary, evolutionary ways of writing and reading autobiographical texts. The characteristics of these new autobiographies include: (1) a splitting of self; (2) a chaotic writing style that blurs boundaries between reality and the fictional; (3) the questioning of gender and identity; (4) and the use of images that invite readers to be spectators and players in the investigation of past life experiences and in the case of Duras, identity formation.[2] Ramsay believes that the new autobiographies, written in a contradictory and destabilizing fashion, go against established, traditional ideologies referring to the very nature of being and the purpose of existence: "the autofictions unfold in a world of ontological and epistemological uncertainty; they provide only double (and contradictory) answers to the investigation of origins and meanings" (Ramsay 1996, 48).

What is the classical view of origins and their signification that is subverted by the new autobiography? Sidonie Smith concurs that the traditional

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[2] With the appearance of a new form of literary expression for autobiographical material, namely *autobiographical fiction,* since the 1960s with writers such as Alain Robbe-Grillet, Nathalie Saurraute, Claude Simon, and of course, Marguerite Duras, emerged a new way of examining and approaching this experimental form of expressing the self. Literary critics such as Raylene Ramsay have in the past referred to such autobiographical texts as *new autobiographies.*

concept of the individual or more precisely, the self, does not have boundaries that oscillate, are unstable or fragmented:

> Certain presumptions of meaning circle around this notion of "self". Its core is understood to be unitary, irreducible, atomic; its boundaries separating inner from outer, well-defined, stable, impermeable; its relationship to the world, unencumbered by alternative, absorbing roles. (Smith 1990, 11)

In traditional autobiographical writing, the portrait of the self exists within a coherent and chronological literary space, one that is a re-formation or re-configuration of the past, rendering the representation of that life to be as unified and solid as the self. However, Duras admits to her reader that neither chronology nor centrality exist within the (re)telling of her life story. This version of her story, like memories themselves, exists in fragments, and in her fragmented writing, Duras tries to replicate the very process of exhuming and resurrecting events from the past: « L'histoire de ma vie n'existe pas. □a n'existe pas. Il n'y a jamais de centre. Pas de chemin, pas de ligne » (*A* 14).

One characteristic of traditional autobiographical writing that Duras does attempt to maintain, however, is agency as she constructs the literary version of her younger self. Both *L'Amant* and *L'Amant de la Chine du Nord* are essentially narratives of the development of the self and the ways in which this self moves through a series of spaces where cultural, social and racial labels intermingle and participate in the formation of the girl's identity.

Ramsay also comments on the crucial connection that exists between memory and life (re)writing. She asserts that although memories serve as the

fabric for recreating a text in the present that makes reference to past events, one must constantly remain aware of the impossibility of recapturing memories on paper in the here and now. For example, the portrait of the author during her or his childhood is always influenced by the author's perspective as an adult or "her or his itinerary and present vision of the recreation of the child she or he once was" (Ramsay 1996, 51). Living longer and therefore having more experiences may affect the process of recollection of episodes from the past and analysis in the present moment. Indeed Duras reaffirms this assertion in *La Vie matérielle:* « Mon histoire, elle est pulvérisée chaque jour, à chaque seconde de chaque jour par le présent de la vie » (88). This erasure of memories by the passage of time is also mentioned in *L'Amant* : « Ils sont morts maintenant, la mère et les deux frères. Pour les souvenirs aussi c'est trop tard » (*A* 38). Writing about the mother, the narrator says, « [j]e n'ai plus dans ma tête le parfum de sa peau ni dans mes yeux la couleur de ses yeux. Je ne me souviens plus de la voix […]. Le rire, je ne l'entends plus, ni le rire, ni les cris. C'est fini, je ne me souviens plus. C'est pourquoi j'en écris si facile d'elle maintenant, si long, si étiré, elle est devenue écriture courante (*A* 38).

In the Durassian fictional world, writing an autobiographical text is to resurrect traces of the past from within. These traces are then transformed by the passage of time, the limits of memory, and the imagination as they are translated into written form. Eileen Angelini suggests that retelling the same event time and again allows Duras to continually offer new perspectives on her past. At the same

time the rewriting or retelling of the "same story" may be seen as a sort of coping mechanism for Duras, a manner through which to slowly peel back the layers of her sometimes difficult and dismal past:

> For Duras, retelling creates the opportunity to layer in changes in emotional perspective from a newly learned point of view or from a point of view that is more mature, more able to rationally cope with and understand earlier memory. (Angelini 1996, 21)

Readers of Duras know that myriad versions of the "same" woman haunt the pages of many of her literary works. So, too, does the representation of what Duras presents in *L'Amant* and *L'Amant de la Chine du Nord* as her adolescent self. Writing more freely about her difficult past in *L'Amant* (than in, for example, *Un Barrage contre le Pacifique,* another Durassian text with many autobiographical elements), Duras claims to have produced the truest version to date of her younger self in this text: « Je n'ai jamais écrit, croyant le faire, je n'ai jamais aimé, croyant aimer, je n'ai jamais rien fait qu'attendre devant la porte fermée » (*A* 35).

Many aspects of Duras's documented life are revealed, either in obscure or modified fashion, or quite truthful manner in *Un Barrage contre le Pacifique, L'Amant* and *L'Amant de la Chine du Nord.* Her parents, lured by the exotic location and the promise of a prosperous financial future, moved to French Indochina in the early 1900s to teach in the colonial school system.[3] Tragedy struck the couple when after expanding their family by having three children,

[3] Adler asserts that it is unknown if Duras's parents had met before Indochina. People living in Henri Donnadieu's hometown believe that Marie Obscur had visited him before leaving for Indochina (13).

Henri Donnadieu passed away and Marie Donnadieu was left to fend for her young family by holding down two jobs, as a teacher by day and a piano player at the local cinema by night (Chester 437). The rest of the family's history seems to be the source of inspiration for *Un Barrage contre le Pacifique,* a novel that depicts and sharply criticizes the French colonial administration's exploitation of the colonized indigenous people as well as the poverty-stricken white population who, like Duras's family, lived on the fringe of the hierarchal, patriarchal, colonial society.

The family moved to France in 1931 where Duras earned two degrees, in law and in political science, before beginning her career as a writer (Chester 438). Duras touches upon these aspects of her life in *L'Amant* and *L'Amant de la Chine du Nord,* devoting the final pages of each text to the family's sea voyage back to France. These elements of Duras's life, scattered throughout many of her texts, are each time reassessed by the author at different points throughout her life:

> Due to Duras's reiterative practices, the reader of [her texts] has the perspectival benefit of reading the expression of one distinct autobiographical moment in time as composed across [several] distinct moments in Duras's life. And that story looks quite different as it reflects the ever-changing eye/I of the author. (Jellenik 14)

These autobiographical aspects are then either re-tweaked or re-worked completely - for example, appearing in the "new" or later text as a character or place with a new name. The hybrid nature of her texts, incorporating both fiction and autobiography, appears at first to be a chaotic collection of fragments, shards of a mirror that reflects life in many directions, making it difficult to detect any

biographical coherence. Yet one of Duras's possible goals of life writing seems to be a kind of resurrection of the pieces that speak to her and through which she can derive meaning. This kind of archeological dig through the past has little to do with a tedious and detailed description of a "factual" past. Indeed her spontaneous, "writing in the moment" style is clearly characteristic of the new autobiographies discussed by Ramsay:

> Duras simultaneously mourns what is lost and shows us the creation of her life as a writer which will help her recover fragments of that lost past in ways that are symbolically meaningful to herself rather than factually accurate. (Vickroy 2003, 94)

> Il y a de vastes endroits où l'on fait croire qu'il y avait quelqu'un, ce n'est pas vrai il n'y avait personne. L'histoire d'une toute petite partie de ma jeunesse je l'ai plus ou moins écrite déjà […]. Ce que je fais ici est différent, et pareil. […] Ici je parle des périodes cachées de cette même jeunesse, de certains enfouissements que j'aurais opérés sur certains faits, sur certains sentiments, sur certains événements. J'ai commencé à écrire dans un milieu qui me portait très fort à la pudeur. […] je vois que tous les champs sont ouverts, qu'il n'y aurait plus de murs […]. (*A* 14-15)

In Duras's writing, memories appear to be revised or reframed in comparison to earlier "versions" presented in her texts as these memories are recalled at different points throughout her life [*Ce que je fais ici est différent, et pareil]*. For the Durassian reader, the concept of revisiting the past through writing in the present further enriches the "central narrative" that resonates throughout Duras's *oeuvre*. According to Jellenik, "[r]ewriting becomes the context within which Duras achieves a major facet of her content: the endless creation and re-creation of identity" (12).

Steven Shapiro discusses the limits of autobiographical writing and the "interference" of a continuing personal experience. He asserts that referring to one's own life through writing bears the marks of the progressive journey through life and the many encounters one has along the way can alter how and what one recalls about the past:

> I see a sequence of *very clear* pictures, but I only know what things were like in so far as they affected myself. And even this aspect of things I remember only through the recollection of the effect it produced on me. (423)

An argument that lends support to this concept of reviving the past in written form as an adult concerns the roles of subjectivity and objectivity in determining whether or not a text is "autobiographical". Shapiro discusses at length how both of these elements function in categorizing a text as autobiographical or fictional. We have to take into account both the personal point of view of the author, namely the "subjective" point of view, as well as the public's opinion or attitude towards the individual, the "objective" point of view:[4]

> An autobiographer is really writing the story of two lives: his life as it appears to himself, from his own position, when he looks out at the world from behind his eye-sockets; and his life as it appears from outside in the minds of others; a view which tends to become in part his own view of himself also, since he is influenced by the opinion of those others. (Shapiro 448)

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[4] For the purposes of my analysis, I will be using the term *objective* to refer to a person's or people's point of view that is "not influenced by personal feelings or opinions in considering and representing facts" ("Objective," def. 1213). This term will be contrasted with *subjective*, meaning, for my analysis, a point of view that is "based on or influenced by personal feelings, tastes, or opinions" ("Subjective," def. 1759).

Duras incorporates an objective point of view into the writing of the two texts discussed in this chapter. Her life story, characterized by a mix of the real and the imagined, is the point of contact for the personal, social and historical. The girl's identity hinges upon the significant historical backdrop of her adolescence and the social norms and morals that emanate from it. Hewitt asserts that "[t]o be poor and white in the French colony is to live a set of contradictions that keeps the child's identifications continually shifting" (111). As the family plays a crucial role in the protagonist's formation of self, it is important to consider how their objectivity is incorporated into Duras's creation of a "new" autobiography. French colonial Indochina shapes her mother's life experience, which is characterized by madness and depression. It further forces the family to face many hardships after the mother's financial ruin, a situation that divides them and casts some family members against others.

The young Duras created through writing by Duras the author attempts to transcend some of the barriers erected by her environment. The particular spaces (the family home and the lover's apartment) within colonial society either reinforce or provide some shelter from the visible racist attitude. However, Duras the writer permits Duras the protagonist to mature according to her own developing ideals. As a young woman who challenges established values and taboos, the autobiographical, fictional version of Duras lays claim to her own body and story and moves forward with her quest for autonomy and female agency:

> [T]he adolescent with whom Duras identifies in 1991 in her text [*L'Amant de la Chine du Nord*] rises above such ethnic and class prejudice by defiantly and transgressively asserting her freedom and assuming her sexuality. The (re)writing of her story inverts power relations, while other colonial women live their empty lives absently, waiting for Europe and romance. (Ramsay 1996, 22)

The Exterior and the Self

One of the goals of an autobiographical text is to help the author to discover her or his identity. The reader of autobiography explores the way in which the author relates to her or his past identity in the present. Jeffrey S. Staley and Laurie Edson use the expression *an act of autobiography* (my emphasis) to talk about the process of autobiographical writing in *L'Amant* because Duras is not simply concerned with the reader's perception of the young Marguerite, but she is at the same time attempting to objectify her past for herself, trying to clarify any representation or version of her self that may have been written in one of her former texts (Staley and Edson 288). In the two Durassian texts examined in this chapter, self-discovery is bound up with identity formation, "the Imaginary and the Symbolic, both self-creation and self-expression" (Ramsay 1996, 64).

Un Barrage contre le Pacifique has also been discussed by critics in the framework of autobiographical texts; this particular literary work which is autobiographically based, recounts the mother's financial failure and her descent into madness. *Un Barrage contre le Pacifique* is more heavily cloaked in fiction than *L'Amant* or *L'Amant de la Chine du Nord*, and there is no association between the young Suzanne and the narrator or author. Taking into account

Ramsay's brief discussion of the presymbolic and the symbolic, one could offer the explanation that Duras's self has not emerged fully in her writing of *Un Barrage contre le Pacifique*. The self will become more visible in Duras's writing when the fragments of the personal, social and historical intersect and the protagonist that is a combination of the real and imagined version of the young Duras is able to transcend the powers that hold her back from individuation:

> Autofiction is a "complementary" [...] relation between the texts of the self of the past and of the present, [...] that is, between what Duras calls the "wild territories" of the unsayable (the presymbolic) and the (symbolic) linguistic order that constitutes the social self. (Ramsay 1996, 54)

Shapiro also emphasizes the importance of autobiographical writing as a means of discovering the self, a self determined by contact with society: "[A]utobiography is a review of a life from a particular viewpoint in time – a review in which attention is focused on the self as it interacts with the world" (425). Both interior (that is, the thoughts, opinions and feelings held by the autobiographer about himself or herself) and exterior influences of a life are intermingled during the creation of an autobiographical text. For example, in *L'Amant* and *L'Amant de la Chine du Nord,* the Chinese lover, her family and the colonial setting can all be considered as external forces exerting influence on the formation of the young girl's identity. The presence of a subjective point of view should not make one question whether or not the author is presenting the "truth" to the reader:

> How Duras chooses to regard the girl growing up in Vietnam, what emotions she believes herself to have felt, cannot rely on objective reality, but only upon subjective representation of that self, the young girl. Any question of the text's "truth" [...] fails to recognize that the text means to write about how Duras views herself, how Duras desires to relate her identity in the past as well as in the present. (Staley and Edson 288)

Philippe Lejeune explains the necessary criteria for distinguishing between autobiography and fiction in his texts, *Le Pacte autobiographique* and *L'Autobiographie en France.* According to Lejeune, in order to classify a work as an autobiography, three factors must be discernible: 1) the text is in narrative or prose form; 2) the subject of the text concerns the author's life, and 3) the identity between the author, protagonist and narrator is established (Lejeune 1971, 14). Lejeune states that a pact (*un pacte romanesque*) is formed between the author and the reader. When considering all three benchmarks stated by Lejeune, one hesitates before classifying *L'Amant* and *L'Amant de la Chine du Nord* as either autobiography or fiction. In both of these texts Duras uses I and she. In addition, the protagonist is referred to solely as the young girl so it is obviously impossible to establish a definite identity between author, narrator and character.

The Self and its Destabilization

As Duras clearly demonstrates in these two works, the self is not fixed in new autobiographical writing. What the reader witnesses instead are fluctuating concepts of the self as its representation is rewritten from *L'Amant* to *L'Amant de la Chine du Nord.* The self in Duras intermingles past and present, narrator and

heroine, breaking any unique tie binding the author to the pronoun I. Traditional autobiographical practice recognizes the temporal relationship between the narrator in the present and the narrated past that s/he is revealing, whereas Duras's writing blurs the boundary between past and present, applying both tenses to the voice of the young girl and of the adult narrator (Hewitt 110). A destabilization of self defies the traditional method of referring to the self by using only the pronoun I. The subject pronoun je signals that we are witness to the author's own feelings and judgements, whereas the use of elle as the subject pronoun shows a public point of view as conceived by the author. As Nina S. Hellerstein articulates:

> [T]he narrator oscillates between the first and third person when describing herself, because she is evoking her own past alternately from her own person, inner point of view and from the point of view of those around her. […] [E]ach one of these points of view contributes to the total portrait of the heroine and the web of relationships which constitutes her life. (48)

By incorporating the pronouns je and elle into her text, "Duras transcends the limits of the personal" (Staley and Edson 291) and includes what she believes to be the public's perception, therefore rendering her vision of the young Duras more real, relevant and powerful, considering the influence of the social and historical on the young girl's self: « [I]l faudra bien que l'argent arrive dans la maison, d'une façon ou d'une autre il le faudra. […] Reste cette petite-là qui grandit et qui, elle, saura peut-être un jour comment on fait venir l'argent dans cette maison » (*A* 33). In *L'Amant de la Chine du Nord* the mother and the eldest brother, steeped in their racist attitudes and hunger for money, are considered to

be spectators, thus members of the public who pass judgement upon the young girl and whose opinions are incorporated into the construction of the text (Hellerstein 48):

> […] si ils ne faisaient rien, elle et lui, [la mère et le fils aîné] la petite serait perdue…qu'il en était sûr, qu'elle serait "allée" avec tous les hommes…
> -Vous l'avez cru, Madame… ?
> -Je le crois encore, Monsieur. (*ACN* 168)

It is important to comment here on the nature and the role of the narrator in *L'Amant* and *L'Amant de la Chine du Nord.* One may wish to consider as well the narratorial position in *Un Barrage contre le Pacifique,* a novel that maintains ties to the traditional novelistic style of writing, as a reference point for the modification of the narrator's position in *L'Amant* and *L'Amant de la Chine du Nord.* The omniscient narrator in *Un Barrage contre le Pacifique* plays a role in Suzanne's objectification; for example, the reader sees her being watched by M. Jo in the bath in exchange for material objects that the family cannot afford, and participates in this voyeurism, which creates a sort of chain reaction in the objectification of the female protagonist. As Chester articulates: "Duras's use of a realistic, novelistic convention that depends on an unproblematized narratorial gaze makes both narrator and reader of *The Sea Wall* complicitous in the voyeurism that objectifies the female protagonist" (442):

> M. Jo demanda à Suzanne de lui ouvrir la porte de la cabine de bains afin qu'il puisse la voir toute nue […]. Le refus était sorti d'elle machinalement. C'avait été non. […] Suzanne, inerte, emmurée, se laissait faire. […]
> -Demain vous aurez votre phonographe, dit M. Jo. […]

> C'est ainsi qu'au moment où elle allait ouvrir et se donner à voir au monde, le monde la prostitua. […] M. Jo, accroché au chambranle de la porte, la regardait. (*BCP* 72-74)

Breaking with the traditional narrative style in *Un Barrage contre le Pacifique,* the narrator in *L'Amant* and *L'Amant de la Chine du Nord* is part of a more complex web of writing that deviates from incorporating a classic position of the invisible narrator and moves towards incorporating a narrator that is actively involved in the splitting of the self that occurs in the new autobiographies. The narrator in these two texts plays a double role. The narrator contributes to the girl's objectification by watching the girl being watched by the Chinese man:

> L'homme élégant est descendu de la limousine, il fume une cigarette anglaise. Il regarde la jeune fille au feutre d'homme et aux chaussures d'or. (*A* 42)

> On voit ce qu'il regarde : Elle, l'enfant. […] Il la regarde tout le temps, il regarde tout d'elle. (*ACN* 84-85)

The narrator also portrays the heroine as the one who is watching her Chinese lover and controls their sexual encounter:

> Elle le regarde. Elle lui demande qui il est (*A* 43). […] C'est un compartiment au sud de la ville. […] Et elle, lente, patiente, elle le ramène vers elle et elle commence à le déshabiller. (*A* 47-49)

> De la limousine noire est sorti un autre homme que celui du livre, un autre Chinois […] il a moins peur que lui, plus d'audace. […] Elle le regarde fort. Farouche serait le mot pour dire ce regard. (*A* 35-37)

The appearance of both je and elle in these texts challenges woman's traditional position of being objectified by man or being only the subject of discourse. The woman who is typically observed and/or described appropriates

the position of the authoritative voice and the voyeur. For example, in *L'Amant* the girl freely expresses her sexual desires; instead of allowing a man to use her body for his own sexual gratification, she tells him how to act and she controls the sexual encounter:

> Elle lui dit: je préférerais que vous ne m'aimiez pas. Même si vous m'aimez je voudrais que vous fassiez comme d'habitude avec les femmes. […] Elle lui demande de ne pas bouger. Laisse-moi. Elle dit qu'elle veut le faire elle. Elle le fait. Elle le déshabille. Quand elle le lui demande il déplace son corps dans le lit […]. (*A* 48-49)

By playing with both pronouns in the text to designate the protagonist, Duras compromises the subordinate position allotted to women by the circulation of patriarchal discourse (Chester 445).

Given that the new autobiographies are characterized by a splitting of the self, the reader recognizes the multiple roles allotted to the young girl in both *L'Amant* and *L'Amant de la Chine du Nord.* She occupies several positions that sometimes clash, causing her at that particular moment to suppress some facet of her identity: daughter, sister, colonizer, prostitute, or lover. In the scene of the family and the Chinese lover at the restaurant in *L'Amant*, for example, the girl is staunchly the "sister" of her racist, patriarchal older brother. The debilitating effect of his presence forces her to treat her lover as a filthy Chinese good-for-nothing, someone whose only useful role is to permit himself to be financially used:

> Nous prenons tous modèle sur le frère aîné face à cet amant. [...] En présence de mon frère aîné il cesse d'être mon amant. [...] Mon désir obéit à mon frère aîné, il rejette mon amant. [...] Mon amant est nié dans justement son corps faible, dans cette faiblesse qui me transporte de jouissance. Il devient devant mon frère un scandale inavouable, une raison d'avoir honte qu'il faut cacher. Je ne peux pas lutter contre ces ordres muets de mon frère. (*A* 65-67)

In considering the young girl's relation to her lover, she is in control and forces him into a position of subordination and powerlessness. However, at the same time she is dominated by her older brother and obeys his rules on the "proper" way a White should treat a Chinese.

The young girl's roles also often intersect and crisscross at different points in the texts, creating a model for the divided self of the new autobiographies, mixing the past rewritten in the present, sometimes through dialogue and the use of je, with "visual" references to the girl being watched or seen by the reader, the narrator or other characters in the text. The reworked scene at the restaurant in *L'Amant de la Chine du Nord* re/presents a young Duras who in the presence of her family, neither denies nor embraces her relationship with the Chinese man. Although the racial tone, the family's social standing and the older brother's manipulation of the family can still be detected in this scene, the reader has a sense of camaraderie and understanding within the family between mother and daughter as opposed to the harsh division and fear of the eldest son that characterizes the family in this scene of *L'Amant.* In *L'Amant de la Chine du Nord* Duras rewrites the family's attitude toward the lover, making them more

receptive to the Chinese man and allowing the girl's self to be dispersed more equally across her roles as daughter, sister and lover:

> Le frère ainé dit tout haut à la mère:
> -Il n'est pas mal le type [le Chinois], il se défend.
> Le Chinois voit le regard de l'enfant sur eux, ceux de cette famille, regard d'amour et de joie sur eux enfin au-dehors […]. (*ACN* 159)

Smith criticizes the way in which the history of the universal self, characteristic of classical autobiographical practices, pushes women to "marginal status at the periphery of consciousness" (Smith 1993, 11). The traditional subject of autobiography is concerned with self and soul, leaving the body to be cast off toward the margins. This patriarchal point of view places female identity in direct correlation to biological and social roles, basically associating female identity with anatomy (reproduction and male sexual pleasure), domesticity and nurturance, forcing them out of the arena owned by the universal subject:

> [The] history of the universal subject thereby underwrites a history of the female subject, for the architecture of the universal subject rests upon and supports the founding identifications of those that are the nonuniversal, the colorful, among whom is "woman." […] Discourses of the universal subject assume reciprocities of self and soul, and they assign the "tremulous private body" to marginal status at the periphery of consciousness. […] [S]ince female identity inheres in women's embodiment as procreator and nurturer, the female subject inhabits mostly that colorful margin […]. Anatomy becomes the irreducible granite at the core of woman's being. (Smith 1993, 11-12)

Duras goes against this casting of the female self in the mould created by defying the moral code of mixing provocative clothing with a symbol of masculine power, and by subverting sexual pleasure to also belong to women. She

also contrasts herself with white women in the colony whose identities are synonymous with emptiness:

> Je regarde les femmes dans les rues de Saigon, dans les postes de brousse. Il y en a de très belles, de très blanches, […]. Elles ne font rien, elles se gardent seulement pour l'Europe, les amants […]. Elles attendent. [...] Elles se regardent. […] Ce manquement des femmes à elles-mêmes par elles-mêmes opéré m'apparaissait toujours comme une erreur. (*A* 27-28)

The Absolute Photograph

The original idea for the text *L'Amant* was a commentary on a collection of photographs to be called *The Absolute Image.* However, this concept of recorded fact was abandoned, and what Durassian readers receive instead is a lyrical current of writing that flows through the present act of writing from the author's body to pen, and then to the reader's page, replacing a sterile and static documented truth of the past. Photos are replaced by the combination of visual memory and imagination that produces the poetic prose of *L'Amant. L'Amant* is a literary work centred on the notion of creativity where the emergence of one's individuality is realized by "the process of creating out of that very initial non-presence" (Cohen 1990, 59):

> Que je vous dise encore, j'ai quinze ans et demi. C'est le passage d'un bac sur le Mékong. L'image dure pendant toute la traversée du fleuve. […] [U]ne photographie aurait pu être prise, comme une autre, ailleurs, dans d'autres circonstances. Mais elle ne l'a pas été. […]. (*A* 11, 16-17)

The creation of the absolute photo through written expression emphasizes the importance of writing in the here and now for Duras, a crucial component of new autobiographical practice. As Cohen asserts: "[T]he text unfolds in the

temporal mode of the present in contrast to photography's inherent past tense of recorded fact" (Cohen 1990, 65). The absolute photo, the writing evoked by this image, and the girl's body "seen" or visualized in the mind and present in the text all work together: the commentary on the photo is embodied in the text and the photo is also the inspiration for the writing. The image also underlines the girl's connection to her approaching independence and eroticism, her metamorphosis into a young woman: "the image of the girl as an absolute is the retrospective construction of feminine desire: A product of the writing, it produces writing and the body which is the subject of the writing" (Thormann 30).

The river over which the girl's body is being carried is the key metaphor for her crossing over to womanhood and her attainment of autonomy and sexual desire. It also symbolizes the young Marguerite's journey to becoming a writer, of being able to produce, years later, a recollection of the past in the present: "With its promise to overflow, the river figures the writer herself, a young girl on the brink of reaffirming her own vocation to overflow, ink on the page, fluids from the body, the metaphor of feminine creativity" (Cohen 1990, 64).

Creation and Representation

Through the process of intertwining fiction and autobiography, Duras explores multiple sites of marginalities – sexual, racial and social. Through Duras's *mélange* of fictional elements and writing about her past in the present, the reader discovers the ways in which Duras often alters existing socio-cultural

configurations. In the case of *L'Amant* and *L'Amant de la Chine du Nord,* Duras's literary representation of her younger self transgresses some of the established expectations of a young white female living in colonial Indochina as she positions herself in an alternative space where the boundaries are blurred between right/wrong, periphery/centre, masculine/feminine, je/elle:

> […] the autobiographical subject may offer up what Nancy Hartsock calls a "standpoint epistemology": an account of the world as seen from the margins, an account which can expose the falseness of the view from the top and can transform the margins as well as the centre. (Smith and Watson, 1992 xx)

The story of the young girl's individuation in both *L'Amant* and *L'Amant de la Chine du Nord* contains numerous illustrations of how a woman can expose and resist the false hierarchal structure of power with men dominating the phallic-like pinnacle and women confined to and obeying from the periphery. In these texts, the young girl is not limited to providing sexual pleasure just for a man; she breaks free from such traditional confines and restraints placed on the female body and assumes a role of sexual assertiveness. In this way, the girl's assumption of the authoritative position forces her lover to be passive. For example, in both *L'Amant* and *L'Amant de la Chine du Nord* the lover's body is the object of the girl's gaze, allowing her to "feminize" him or put him in the position traditionally occupied by a woman:

> La peau est d'une somptueuse douceur. Le corps. Le corps est maigre, sans force, sans muscles, il pourrait avoir été malade, être en convalescence, il est imberbe, sans virilité autre que celle du sexe, il est très faible […]. (*A* 49)

> Elle le regarde aussi. Elle le voit. Elle se recule. Elle regarde le corps maigre et long, souple, parfait, de la même sorte de beauté miraculeuse que les mains. (*ACN* 83)

This added dimension of gender further complicates the existing dyad comprised of class and race: "The axes of the subject's identifications and experiences are multiple, because locations in gender, class, race, ethnicity and sexuality complicate one another" (Smith and Watson 1992, xiv). Writing about a white female adolescent who prostitutes herself is in itself a defiance of the classical, male-oriented domain of autobiography where the I referred to "Man", a term that represents the privileged, white male. It turns the private (which is at the heart of autobiographical writing) into the political. In Duras's *oeuvre*, politics are sometimes inevitable, certainly if one takes into consideration her harsh critique of the French colonial system in Indochina in *Un Barrage contre le Pacifique,* a text that lays the framework for later texts such as *L'Amant* and *L'Amant de la Chine du Nord.* Duras's autobiographical practices in these literary works challenges the established order in the reality of French Indochina. She questions old discourses of identity with her entanglement of I, she, the girl, the child and she resists a traditional ideological framing by writing about taboo subjects (prostitution, incest, a young woman's sexual pleasure):

> And there are certainly histories of the subject to be negotiated in that "I" space, histories that make trouble for her [the woman] as she takes up that autobiographical "I". Those histories may press her to silence or they may encourage her to cross, crisscross, doublecross that "I" in order to move from silence to self-narrative. (Smith 1993, 4)

The ferry crossing on the Mekong and the young Duras presented to the reader there speak volumes about how Duras wishes to portray a version of her younger self living in colonial Indochina:

> The autobiographical subject confronts all these "bodies" [social, political, cultural] at the scene of writing. And while she finds herself subjected to the social meanings of bodies, she can find ways to resist the kind of body pressed upon her through the body politic. […] [S]he comes to an awareness of the relationship of her specific body to the cultural "body" and to the body politic. (Smith 1993, 130-131)

The image of the girl on the ferry stems from the imagined photograph. Even though this photo never existed in tangible form, it did exist in the writer's imagination, proof of which is seen in the text itself; and upon reading the text, it exists in the reader's mind as well. The choice of outfit for the girl, « une robe de soie naturelle, […] cette fameuse paire de talons hauts en lamé or [et] un chapeau d'homme » (*A* 18-19) sends the message that this young Marguerite will free herself from a traditional feminine subordinate position through the coupling of a man's fedora with a translucent silk frock and high heels. The fedora, symbolic of male domination, is contrasted with the girl's seductive dress and shoes, symbols of the female sexual object: « L'ambiguïté déterminante de l'image, elle est dans ce chapeau » (*A* 19). By writing the representation of her adolescent self in this manner, Duras aligns herself with both the desiring subject and object of desire (Sankey 66): « Il n'y avait pas à attirer le désir. Il était dans celle qui le provoquait ou il n'existait pas » (*A* 28). The young girl's outfit also plays a role in identity

formation, allowing the girl to explore her own female sexual desire and to actively experiment with male sexual desire.

The choice of outfit, especially the fedora, places the girl in stark contrast to the other white women in the colony. The girl positions herself outside of the norm, going against the typical and accepted feminine style of dress. She makes an assertive yet controversial statement by combining this masculine symbol of power with a dress and shoes fit for a prostitute, saying in fact, I am defying established sexual and social conventions (Baisnée 48). The young Marguerite provokes the male gaze and male sexual desire, as opposed to the other colonial white women who spend their days closeted inside their lavish homes, temporarily ignoring their desires, afraid to be provocative or assertive, and always waiting for the future:

> Je regarde les femmes dans les rues de Saigon, dans les postes de brousse. […] Elles ne font rien, elles se gardent seulement, elles se gardent pour l'Europe […]. Elles s'habillent pour rien. Elles se regardent. Dans l'ombre de ces villas, elles se regardent pour plus tard, elles croient vivre un roman, elles ont déjà les longues penderies pleines de robes à ne savoir qu'en faire, collectionnées comme le temps, la longue suite des jours d'attente. (*A* 27)

> Most women did with themselves nothing at all ; they waited, in attitudes more or less gracefully passive, for a man to come that way and furnish them with a destiny. (James qtd. in Smith 1993, 13)

In summary, for Marguerite Duras, textual form is one key tool for self-exploration. Reworking common autobiographical threads allows her to see the self through fresh eyes, to regenerate a central story that incorporates untapped

resources due to the passing of time and new exploits. Jellenik rightly assesses Duras's literary expression of self when she writes: "Rendered obsolete the moment it blackens the page, a written identity produced by the hand of Marguerite Duras demands frequent replacement, infinite rewriting" (10). In both *L'Amant* and *L'Amant de la Chine du Nord,* the intermingling of je and elle positions the self as both a subject of and in discourse. The self is also split, allowing the adolescent version of Duras to participate in objectification and to exist as well as the object of the gaze. Writing the past as an act in the present permits the contemplation of the writer's relation to the past. Fictive and autobiographical elements combine to create a complex weaving of themes of desire, madness, power, and the family's influence in a colonial context:

> The humiliations, wild freedoms, and passions of her childhood in Indochina, like her experiences of the war or the sufferings and joys of human bonding, reflect both a sociohistorical situation and an individuated psyche characterized with, and fear of, domination and self-loss. (Ramsay 1996, 56)

From Duras's early texts to the writing she produced near the end of her life, revisiting both fictive and autobiographical aspects of her life has remained at the heart of her literary texts. Redrafting such elements is critical to Duras's unveiling of a past marked by the constant fracturing of self, a self dispersed across time, memory and relationships. The Durassian self is never set in stone but is one that is re-created and re-configured from fragments of memories affected by the passage of time. Duras's re-presentation of the self, written at

different moments in her literary and personal history, serves as an exemplary illustration of the quest for identity in new autobiographical writing.

Conclusion
Re-reading Rewriting in Duras: A Reappraisal

> Along with the constant repositioning that characterizes her work, Duras' elusiveness as a literary figure is no doubt one of the sources of fascination for readers – the artist exploring a variety of practices that contest and criticize one another. Part of the task of situating Duras as a figure is to explore the sources and effects of the fascination she exercises upon the reader. Her obsessional method yields a variety of effects, not the least of which is a curious tension between familiarity and estrangement produced by the reappearance of figures in a series of texts [...] (2).
>
> SharonWillis

In this conclusion I return once more to the kaleidoscope metaphor for rewriting in Duras. In keeping with the kaleidoscopic nature of Duras's writing and instead of simply repeating patterns already discussed in the previous chapters, I would like to evaluate further some of the questions of inquiry raised in my analysis which are of interest to me for future research and perhaps to my reader as well, who will hopefully continue to read and re-read Duras in a new way. I would like to shed more light on these prisms of kaleidoscopic writing to see what configurations emerge. I also want to touch briefly on the reader's part in the re-reading rewriting process. In many respects the Durassian reader may be considered as an active participant in rewriting: s/he can be compared to the person who gazes into the lens of a kaleidoscope and then twists.

The kaleidoscopic nature of Duras's writing not only permits the reader to witness the re-presentation of various motifs such as the family, the mother-child

relation, the love story, madness, and autobiographical writing. Kaleidoscopic writing also plays a crucial role in permitting the reader to re-focalize his or her attention on the blurred boundaries between the dichotomies of life/death, separation/fusion, centre/periphery, interior/exterior, suffering/pleasure as they are re-worked throughout the Durassian *œuvre*. The major themes I have presented in this thesis effectively illustrate the ways in which Duras's (re)writing permits the reader to experience the re-presentation of these key motifs, motifs anchored by these dichotomies. Yet the metaphor of the kaleidoscope foregrounds an analysis establishing that the Durassian *œuvre* is rich in refracted glances and reflections of core elements of the family, the mother-child relationship, the love story, madness, and autobiographical writing. This metaphor also permits the reader to see more small pieces of the kaleidoscope that we have not seen before.

Reflective Glances of the Durassian Family

In the Durassian family, the mother-child relation, and the relationship between lovers, a mixture of adoration and domination is detectable in the relationship. Duras's texts often deal with the complex bond between sisters and brothers, parents and children, and of course the missing father. A confusion of roles is often the result of such unresolved (and unresolvable) dichotomies. Adoration between family members may manifest itself through incest and incestuous desire, and domination is evidenced through abuse and fear. The daughter in *La Vie tranquille, Un Barrage contre le Pacifique,* and *L'Amant* must

carve out a path to follow toward individuation amongst the chaos and complications of her fictional world. In *La Vie tranquille* Françou is forced to confront the question "Who am I?" after the death of her beloved brother Nicolas.[1] In *La Vie tranquille*, as we have also seen in later texts such as *L'Amant* and *L'Amant de la Chine du Nord,* the daughter plays the role of nurturer and protector to her younger brother. Françou's intense love for Nicolas is bound up with a feeling of responsibility for his well-being and happiness:

> Elle a la sensation que sa vie doit être consacrée et se confond à celle de Nicolas. Ils ont deux corps, mais une vie. […] Par cet amour, Francine oublie sa propre existence. Depuis l'enfance, elle ne s'appartient pas, nourrisant le désir de vivre dans Nicolas, pour Nicolas. (Fan 54)

Nicolas's violent death brings about a new outlook on life for Françou as she is now able to examine what is lacking: her "self". However, as we also see in *Un Barrage contre le Pacifique,* another text from the first period of Duras's writing career, the sister (and daughter) is unable to completely break free from her family. Rong Fan returns to the source of life, the mother's womb, asserting that the corporeal connection between brother and sister serves as an unbreakable bond and will prevent Françou from individuation: « [D]ans le fantasme inconscient de la sœur, ce corps perdu du frère, issu du même ventre, n'est-il pas aussi une partie de son propre corps inséparable ? Ainsi l'auteur nous laisse voir

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[1] Given that *La Vie tranquille* is one of the first texts written by Duras (*Un Barrage contre le Pacifique* (1950), another text from the first period of Duras's writing career, has already been discussed at length in my analysis) and since pieces of the kaleidoscopic images are very much in evidence in this text, I believe that this text merits further discussion here since it amplifies what has already been examined considering the Durassian female protagonist's complex individuation.

l'impossibilité pour Francine de sortir de l'ombre de son frère […] » (Fan 60). Françou returns to the image of her brother's mangled body on the train tracks while contemplating her own living and breathing body that was once, like Nicolas, thriving inside the same mother:

> Nicolas sur les rails de chemin de fer […]. Ces trois morceaux d'homme, c'avait été mon frère Nicolas. Difficile d'imaginer maintenant que je ne savais pas depuis toujours qu'il mourrait ainsi. […] Entre mille autres c'est moi qui ai poussé dans le corps de ma mère et qui ai pris cette place qu'une autre aurait pu occuper. (*VT* 177-8)

In the end, Françou chooses to marry Tiène, a choice that keeps her tied to her family and her deceased brother (Fan 60): « Nicolas, même si j'exagère ma douleur de l'avoir perdu, je le sais bien que Tiène l'avait déjà remplacé. J'ai toujours trouvé le moyen de tout remplacer » (VT 171).

As we see in *La Vie tranquille,* the relationship between brother and sister in *Un Barrage contre le Pacifique* also wields a powerful hold over the daughter. At the end of the text, Suzanne's separation from her mother is a combination of both the daughter's will to seek individuation and the suppressed or unconscious desire for the mother's death. However, Suzanne leaves the plain with her brother Joseph instead of staying with Agosti, the man with whom she has her first sexual encounter. In this particular case, the relationship between brother and sister is marked by adoration, domination, and incestuous love.

A Glimpse of the Father

As we have seen throughout, the father is usually absent in Duras's texts. However, the symbolic role of father figure is often manifested in other male characters. A concluding few words about the father in Duras's texts provide a more complete picture of the family in her writing. In *Un Barrage contre le Pacifique,* Joseph is portrayed by the mother as the caretaker of the family. When the mother is severely depressed, he brings her medication: « Joseph passa devant elle, monta dans le bungalow et redescendit avec un verre d'eau et les pilules » (*BCP* 31). He is the one who provides food for the family by hunting: "Je [la mère] me demande ce qu'on mangerait si tu n'étais pas là pour en tuer » (*BCP* 81). His attachment to their deceased father's phonograph is an obvious manifestation of his assumption of the family patriarchal role. Rong Fan sees the phonograph itself as having a symbolic paternal function in that the record player allows Joseph to have a connection to his father and to separate from the mother's hold:

> Consciemment ou non, Joseph ne veut plus « être le pénis » de sa mère, il veut devenir un homme en se libérant de l'autorité maternelle, et « avoir un pénis ». [...] Quand la mère le menace de « jeter le phonographe dans la rivière », cet avertissement apparaît comme une menace de castration, car la mère pressent que le phonographe suscite chez Joseph le désir de la quitter, mais elle souhaite le garder dans son fantasme d'avoir toujours un pénis à elle. (Fan 140)

Although the father is present in *La Vie tranquille,* there remains a patriarchal role to be filled since the father is powerless and fragile, no longer fulfilling his duties as head of the household. In this text it is Tiène, Françou's

future husband, who becomes a father figure. Fan indicates that the name Tiène brings to mind connotations of assuming the role of patriarch in the family. She connects the choice of a Chinese name for Françou's lover to the typical peasant Chinese family at the time of publication of this text (1944). Tiène is a name that appears to be French due to its spelling but retains its significance in Chinese since it « peut porter la marque de la transcription de différents caractères chinois dont 'le champ' ou 'la terre' » (Fan 146). The Chinese who lived in the countryside placed a great importance on owning land and would often name a son "champ". If a family owned a decent plot of land, they could live off this land and provide for the family. Thus the name Tiène evokes connotations of a secure existence, a provider, a *vie tranquille* – the role generally associated with the father of the household (Fan 146-7).

In this text we have a financially ruined family struggling to eke out a living from their land. However, with parents « qui sont devenus quasiment déments, finis » (*VT* 176), Bugues is revived by Tiène who is ready to work the land and loan money to the family in order to save the farm. He is accepted into the family and fulfills several roles: he "replaces" the deceased brother Nicolas, becomes Françou's lover, and acts as a paternal figure for the entire family. Fan asserts that this confusion of roles produces « des sentiments mêlés de désir œdipien et d'amour fraternel » (148). Françou falls in love with Tiène, thus permitting her to distance herself from the incestuous love she has for her brother Nicolas and in this way, Tiène acts as the father who bans incestuous relations

between brother and sister. Unlike Françou's real father, Tiène will not "abandon" her: « Je l'ai. Tiène, c'était donc cet homme qui, finalement, resterait » (*VT* 218). At the same time, Tiène is seen as the replacement for Nicolas, both as a brother and the lover Françou fantasizes about. Indeed Tiène's role in the text is multifaceted and the relationship he develops with Françou is equally complex. According to Fan, Françou's feelings toward Tiène « pourr[aient] impliquer à la fois l'amour fantasmatique pour le père et pour le frère » (148).

Echoes of the Mother-Child Relation

Entangled in the daughter's love affair in *Un Barrage contre le Pacifique, L'Amant,* and *L'Amant de la Chine du Nord* is the family's influence and the colonial setting in which they live. In *Un Barrage contre le Pacifique,* developing an identity means that the daughter must deal with a mother who is powerless in her own right within a colonial society ruled by class and racism. The mother is a victim of colonial authority but her daughter (and other children) are victims of their mother's reaction to her own inferior social position. De Kanter argues that Freud decontextualizes the mother-daughter relationship since he presents only the mother as part of the Symbolic Order and neglects her identity as a woman. De Kanter emphasizes the importance of including the mother's womanness and the social context in the mother-daughter relationship and the daughter's identity formation.

Un Barrage contre le Pacifique is an integral text for my study of rewriting in Duras since its plot presents all of the motifs included in my analysis. Within the text itself we see representations of woman as a mother, daughter, sister, and lover. Michel David asserts that the mother figure is a constant fixture in the Durassian *œuvre* and that this character can be seen not only as the obvious giver of life but also as the point of origin for other major themes in Duras's writing.[2] For David, the mother-daughter relation is continually re-presented in that while the Durassian daughter struggles with the fusion/separation nature of their relationship, she "grows up" (or is presented as an adult and a lover) and thus allows the reader to experience Duras's versions of female identity, femininity, and womanhood:

> Elle [Marguerite Duras] devra aimer-quitter sa mère pour des hommes, des amants et puis écrire tout cela sa vie durant. Elle réécrira ainsi le « même » livre en quelque sorte, nécessairement, et franchira tous les paliers de la narration, tous les plans des différentes figures d'identifications féminines qui recèle son œuvre et dont elle usera : un enfant devient « une » , puis « *l'enfant* » [...] ensuite une fille, une jeune femme voire une femme : ravissante, ravie, ravisseuse, ravagée, à l'occasion enragée, [...]souvent même une femme perdue [...] ou sans nom [...] réduite à quelques lettres matriculaires [...] femmes ravinées, errantes. En tout cas, la création durassienne est là : toutes partent d'un trou maternel qu'elles regardent précisément, au risque de s'y absorber et dont elles s'éloignent ou non chacune à leur manière. (David 2005, 101)

[2] Hirsch also discusses the key role played by the Durassian mother in other relationships in which the daughter is involved and which are central to my analysis (the family and the lover): "If the figure of the mother appears as both the point of departure and the destination of the narrative, the narrative places her in a multiple network of mediations with the male brothers and the lover whom she ultimately displaces in her daughter's passionate and disturbed attachment." (147)

The mother who refuses to allow her children to grow away from her is at the centre of *Un Barrage contre le Pacifique*. The mother's concern for her daughter's well-being in particular is underscored by her inability to allow Suzanne to become "a situated daughter," to borrow de Kanter's term. De Kanter highlights the need for any daughter to recognize that her mother possesses her own sense of subjectivity and feminine individuality. It is only then that the daughter can effectively separate from her mother. According to de Kanter, "[T]he daughter discovers the reality of the outside world through the interventions of the womanness in the mother" (30). In Duras's texts, the daughter is subjected to a mother who is silenced and has renounced her identity as a woman and sexual being.

Margaret Whitford asserts that one of Irigaray's goals in feminist writing is to effect change in the symbolic order (Whitford 1991, 75). Whitford is interested in examining the ways in which Irigaray attempts to establish a place for the mother-daughter relationship within the symbolic: "I want to look at the relationship which the symbolic has bypassed, the mother-daughter relationship, and argue that for Irigaray it is essential to bring that relationship into the symbolic […]" (Whitford 1991, 76). According to Irigaray, a lack of representations of the mother-daughter relation in the symbolic acts as a barrier to women creating an identity outside of their maternal role. Questioning woman's identity as other than a mother poses a risk to man's position of domination in the symbolic order:

> La culture, le langage, l'imaginaire et la mythologie dans lesquels nous vivons présentement [...] cet édifice qui a l'air si propre et si subtil, voyons sur quel sol il est bâti...Est-il si acceptable que ça ? Ce sous-sol, c'est la femme reproductrice de l'ordre social, mise en infrastructure de cet ordre : toute notre culture repose sur le meurtre de la mère. [...] Est-ce qu'il n'y a pas une fluidité, quelque déluge, qui pourrait ébranler cet ordre social ? Et si nous faisons bouger le fondement de l'ordre social, tout bouge. (Irigaray 1981, 81)

Irigaray sees the daughter's difficult and complex separation from her mother as a symptom of women's position in the symbolic order. Woman is synonymous with the maternal function and this one-to-one relation between woman and maternity has successfully suppressed any independent social position woman may occupy (Whitford 1991, 80). As a result, both mother and daughter suffer: the mother "must remain unacknowledged, confined to a predesignated reproductive function" (Grosz 1989, 121) while the daughter lacks a positive female role model in a social context:

> Donc une mère, c'est quoi? Quelqu'une qui fait des gestes commandés, stéréotypés, qui n'a pas de langage personnel et qui n'a pas d'identité. Mais comment, pour nous les filles, avoir un rapport personnel et se constituer une identité par rapport à quelqu'une qui n'est qu'une fonction ? (Irigaray 1981, 86)

Whitford summarizes some of the difficulties women must contend with in order to create a "new" symbolic order and its possible ramifications for woman-to-woman relationships, as discussed by Irigaray in "Créer un Entre-Femmes" (1986) and *Ethique de la différence sexuelle* (1984). Among these complexities is the assertion "that women suffer from an inability to individuate

themselves, […] from lack of respect for or, more often, lack of perception of, the other woman as different" (Whitford 1991, 79).

> [J]e crois qu'il importe que nous refusions de nous soumettre […] à un rôle social désubjectivé : le rôle social maternel désubjectivé, commandé par un certain ordre, soumis à la division du travail – producteur/reproductrice – qui nous enferme dans une simple fonction. A-t-on jamais demandé aux pères de renoncer à être des hommes ? Nous n'avons pas à renoncer à être des femmes pour être des mères. (Irigaray 1981, 27)

The Durassian texts discussed in light of the mother-child relation effectively illustrate complications of maternal fusion and separation, as well as the ramifications for both mother and daughter: clinging to her maternal attachment means that the daughter finds herself "in an atemporal, locationless void" (Hughes 169) where individuation is stifled. Both mother and daughter will lack authentic mutual exchange since the many facets of their individual female identities are shadowed or overpowered by their respective positions in the patriarchal system. Does the Durassian daughter effectively separate from her mother in a way that allows both women to occupy "new" positions in the symbolic order? In the opinion of Hughes, the mother's voice is ultimately silenced in *L'Amant* : "Maternal erasure occurs via a process of narrative silencing" (172).[3] In this respect, the mother does not move forward since she

[3] Hirsch points out that Duras chose to let the mother's voice be heard in her struggle against the corrupt colonial government in Indochina when she included the mother's disturbing letter to government agents in *Un Barrage contre le Pacifique*. The mother's letter publicizes her troubles and failures as she talks about her financial ruin, the death and poverty surrounding her on the plain, her depression and sleepless nights, and her children who will eventually leave her. This letter reappears in *L'Eden Cinéma* where Joseph warns Suzanne to think of the letter as a negative example and to use it as a reminder of what she should do differently from her mother (Hirsch

remains in her traditional role of nurturer and is abandoned as the daughter moves into a symbolic governed by the father. It is interesting to note as well that in the texts chosen for my analysis of the mother-child relationship, the mother does not leave or returns to the colony and thus stays within the confines of a patriarchal system: in *Un Barrage contre le Pacifique* it is explicitly stated that she dies there, however, in *L'Amant* and *L'Amant de la Chine du Nord,* the moment of her death is not discussed but the daughter alludes to her mother remaining in or returning to the colony:

> [E]lle ira une dernière fois au barrage. Elle s'assiéra sur la vérandah face au couchant, on regardera une fois encore vers le Siam, une dernière fois, jamais ensuite, même lorsqu'elle quittera de nouveau la France, quand elle changera encore d'avis et qu'elle reviendra encore une fois en Indochine pour prendre sa retraite à Saigon […]. (*A* 36-7)

> Ma mère, elle a beaucoup de mal à partir de la colonie. À chaque congé elle croit qu'elle va partir et puis elle reste. Elle dit qu'elle est devenue une indigène à la longue, comme nous, Paulo et moi. Qu'il y a beaucoup de coloniaux comme elle. (*ACN* 106-7)

Since the daughter's identity is bound up with her mother and their relationship, it is critical for the daughter to come to terms with the complexity that characterizes their bond and to sort through the contradictory nature associated with maternal attachment. Given that *L'Amant de la Chine du Nord* is the last Durassian text where the mother is discussed and that in this particular

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148). Like Hughes, Hirsch also addresses the silent mother in *L'Amant:* "In *The Lover,* where no such letter appears, the act of silencing the mother is more comprehensive. […] Duras's narrator focuses on her own relation to the mother's rage and violence, especially on how maternal anger and maternal madness affect and inform her own imagination and her own writing. It is as though the mother's own discourse could be better rewritten, revised, by the daughter if it were excised from the text […]" (148).

text there is evidence of a new understanding between daughter and mother, I believe that Duras's writing here is more in tune with Irigaray's call for positive representations of the pre-oedipal period and for relations between mothers and daughters to be seen as "an active subject-to-subject relation" (Grosz 124):

> [W]ithin a psychoanalytic frame, in *L'Amant de la Chine du nord* there seems to be an attempt to resolve the conflict between a pre-oedipal stage of unity with the mother and a situation of oedipal conflict in which identification with the mother (as inside, lack of desire, lack of agency and power) requires renunciation of outside "phallic" desire, excitement, power. (Ramsay 1994, 51)

A Triangular Prism: The Love Story

Just as Duras writes and rewrites both the positive and negative facets of a mother-daughter relationship, she also incorporates opposing emotions around the fictional love affairs she creates: « Tout, il devra raconter, le bonheur aussi bien que la souffrance, aussi bien le désespoir que la gaieté » (*ACN* 223). The Durassian love story is characterized by the intervention of a third party in the typical dyadic relationship. Family members are often guilty of interfering in and wielding power over the young girl's decision to end the affair with her male lover. In *Un Barrage contre le Pacifique, L'Amant,* and *L'Amant de la Chine du Nord* exterior forces, such as the family and colonial society have a serious impact on the relationship between lovers. The link between the gaze and female desire is an important element of the lovers' relationship. The mother's relation to her own body and the way in which the young girl attempts to not repeat this pattern by

pushing existing social, cultural, and patriarchal boundaries is also of interest here since it helps to solidify the third party's position in the love story by taking the mother as an example.

The mother in these texts is significant solely in terms of maternity and is otherwise devalued in her roles as a woman and sexual being. Karin Flaake asserts that several psychoanalytic approaches based on a feminist viewpoint fail to address "the sexual development of girls and the relevance of the female body within the context of the mother-daughter relationship" (Flaake 7). She underscores the need to understand the ways in which patriarchal ideals of femininity are passed on from one generation of women to the next and to move away from a male definition of femininity (Flaake 8).

Flaake maintains that while the daughter needs to develop a sense of her own body and sexuality, mothers must help their daughters to "remove the exclusive power that men have had in defining the value of femininity [and to] teach their daughters a positive value of the female body" (10). Indeed in both *Un Barrage contre le Pacifique* and *L'Amant* the mother reinforces the misogynist-inspired "value" of woman's body as sexual object by allowing and encouraging her daughter to prostitute herself. In both texts it has also been established that the mother is unable to relate to her daughter's sexual desire:

> [Dans *Un Barrage contre le Pacifique* Duras] dévoile ici une mère qui, à l'évidence, lutte en fait contre […] l'image d'un corps féminin que sa fille incarne à l'inverse du sien qu'elle semble avoir « oublié », avoir même clochardisé, mis au rebut comme une vieille chose. (David 2005, 104)

Laura Mulvey links the male-centred, socially established interpretation of female sexuality to the gaze and spectacle. Although Mulvey's text, *Visual and Other Pleasures,* is mostly concerned with the filmic image, her work is also applicable to my selection of Durassian texts related to the love story because of the crucial role played by the gaze in the cinematic-style of writing of *L'Amant de la Chine du Nord.* Mulvey discusses the different forms of pleasure associated with the cinema, one being scopophilia or simply pleasure in looking (Mulvey 16). In classic narrative film, the woman is the erotic object on display for both the male characters and the spectators in the audience (Mulvey 19). Mulvey insists that in true traditional misogynist style, man is active in advancing the narrative or maintaining control while woman is degraded to being visible for man and for the audience of the film:[4]

> In a world ordered by sexual imbalance, pleasure in looking has been split between active/male and passive/female. The determining male gaze projects its fantasy onto the female figure [...]. In their traditional exhibitionist role women are simultaneously looked at and displayed, with their appearance coded for strong visual and erotic impact so that they can be said to connote *to-be-looked-at-ness.* (Mulvey 19)

In my analysis I have examined oppositions related to the gaze present in Duras's texts and how the balance may shift between any two elements in a text written later on in her career (for example, feminine/masculine, subject/object,

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[4] This discussion leads me to the role of the reader or here, the reader as spectator, in Duras's rewriting of the young girl's development and individuation. For example, in *Un Barrage contre le Pacifique* we the readers witness M. Jo watching Suzanne in *la cabine de bains* and see Agosti looking at Suzanne's naked body for the first time in the forest. In *L'Amant* the reader oscillates between watching the Chinese lover watch the young girl's body in the apartment and vice-versa.

public/private). Duras's rewriting of these oppositions often offers a feminist perspective on a woman's relationship to sexual desire and control over her own body. She often invites the reader's gaze to become part of the text, such as in *L'Amant* and/or *L'Amant de la Chine du Nord* where the reader participates in the young girl's shift from the passive object position to subject by witnessing the girl's active construction of selfhood. This image, constructed and presented to the reader throughout each of these texts, contrasts with the subordinate role allotted to Suzanne in *Un Barrage contre le Pacifique:* "[T]he reader of *The Sea Wall* is aligned with the disembodied point of view of the omniscient narrator, [whereas] the reader of *The Lover,* by contrast, is a spectator whose presence and gaze are actively solicited" (Chester 445).

A Prism/Prison of Madness

As discussed in the mother-child chapter, the relationship between mother and daughter in Duras is often tainted by the mother's madness. According to Giorgio, "maternal madness [in Duras], and the dysfunctional mother-daughter dynamic it engenders, are contextualised in terms of colonial power relations" (171). However, madness in Duras affects not only the mother-daughter bond in a colonial context; madness is also experienced by other characters (who are sometimes in a colonial setting) whose lack of identity is at the centre of their existence. As Renate Günther states: "From within the fairly conventional scenario of *Le Ravissement,* Duras begins to undermine the concept of 'identity'

as a set of social definitions and positions in an institutionalised structure of relationships" (Günther 1993, 16).

Existence and mental instability are affected and driven by the cultural, political, physical, and emotional obstacles surrounding the protagonists in *Le Ravissement de Lol V. Stein* and *Le Vice-consul.* Carol J. Murphy discusses the significant impact of the stifling atmosphere often present in Duras's texts on the characters' "being" and mental state: "Emblems of alienation and absence occur throughout the texts; grills, walls, barriers, empty spaces and hostile natural forces reflect the estrangement and negative feelings of protagonists" (Murphy 1982, 10). In Lol's case, we see a woman trapped within a never-ending, obsessive quest to re-live the night of the ball and to experience the pain of separating definitively from her fiancé. She wanders around town, moving from her too orderly, too perfect, sterile home to lying in a barren field of rye, watching Jacques and Tatiana's affair unfold before her very eyes because « [e]lle veut à tout prix maintenir l'équilibre du triangle pour perpétuer sa place dans cette passion » (Schuster 128). The recurring scene in this text of Lol lying in the rye field is an excellent example of the way in which Duras makes use of dichotomous structures in her (re)writing: presence/absence, past/present.

If Lol's situation is described as mesmerizing due to her incessant yet repetitive movement from one place to the next, then the vice-consul's could be depicted as smothering and confined since he finds himself in an inescapable environment where he is constantly reminded of his horrendous act of shooting at

the lepers during his posting in Lahore. There is no refuge from the nefarious effects of colonization on the native population: outside his door the destitute, diseased and starving population of Calcutta crowds around, waiting for scraps to be cast out from the lavish parties thrown by the white diplomats living at the embassy. At these social gatherings, the vice-consul is publicly scrutinized and seen as a threat to the diplomatic population's safety and to the "goal" of sustained order in the colony.

Both Lol and the vice-consul (as well as Anne-Marie Stretter) demonstrate a certain "lack" or "non-existence" and this void is often made evident in the text through the stylistic use of numerous *blancs,* unfinished sentences or lack of any verbal expression of emotion. Murphy remarks that "[i]n *Le Ravissement de Lol V. Stein,* words are split apart or destroyed. They signify by their very *absence,* already seen in the proliferation of blank spaces on the pages of the text" (Murphy 1982, 100). Lol manifests an inability to cry or to show suffering at the time of her mother's death. She is also unable to find words to express the mental instability she lives and breathes, and thus it is the narrator, Jacques Hold, who attempts to explain her incapability of describing the absence of words (Murphy 1982, 100):

> Lol ne va pas loin dans l'inconnu sur lequel s'ouvre cet instant. […] [P]our sa tête et pour son corps, leur plus grande douleur et leur plus grande joie confondues jusque dans leur définition devenue unique mais innommable faute d'un mot. […] Faute de son existence, elle se tait. Ç'aurait été un mot-absence, un mot-trou, creusé en son centre d'un trou, de ce trou où tous les autres mots auraient été enterrés. On n'aurait pas pu le dire mais on aurait pu le faire résonner. (*RLVS* 47-8)

Reflections of Autobiographical (Re)writing

Duras attempted to bring to the fore many of the periods in her own life that are marked by her relationship with her family members, in particular her mother, and her love affair. As stated by Cathy Jellenik: "Rewriting becomes the context within which Duras achieves a major facet of her content: the endless creation and re-creation of identity" (12). Since the establishment of the textual young Marguerite's identity is heavily influenced by her family, her mother (and her mother's madness), and her lover, autobiographical writing is a logical even if incomplete end point for my analysis. In Duras's autobiographical writing we see all these motifs in a different light as Duras re-presents to the reader her version of her own identity as a young girl growing up in a colonial setting. Readers are drawn not only to the captivating, mesmerizing, and obsessive fictional world created by Duras but also to the pieces of Duras's real life scattered throughout her texts. As readers of Duras we can take a second look at the core elements presented here by turning the kaleidoscope lens one more time and looking at these motifs or prisms under a different light, that being autobiographical rewriting. Of course, Duras's life has been discussed time and again; however, as close and critical readers, we must question the veracity of "the facts" as presented by either a Durassian critic or Duras herself.

Perhaps this explains the widespread speculation about whether or not *L'Amant* is a "true" representation of Duras's life. This goal of attracting an active

reader is closely linked to the new style of autobiographical writing found in Duras's texts. One of the elements of new autobiographical writing involves a reinterpretation of the past from the vantage point of the present and not simply a reiteration of one's life story. Susan Cohen believes that both author and reader share a temporal relation to the text: Duras focuses on the resuscitation of memories in the present act of writing while the reader gains access to this past through the reading experience in the here and now (Cohen 60). Some critics of autobiographical writing also argue that constructing a life story by incorporating fact and fiction is a choice made by the author which may reveal more truth about that individual than originally thought (Siegel 28). Gregory Jay speculates, from a psychoanalytic perspective, about the true version of self that may be lurking behind the much discussed mix of masquerade and authenticity in new autobiographical writing:

> The identification of the self with the process of symbolic construction means that a text's way of composition, rather than its narrative events or referents, may contain the "truer" autobiography since its ambivalent signifying movements enact the defenses and displacements that constitute the itinerary of identity and concept formation. (Jay qtd. in Seigel 28)

L'Amant de la Chine du Nord, with its numerous *blancs* and verbs denoting uncertainty, calls for the reader's participation in the creation of a text about identity and individuation (Jellenik 49). The reader must piece together fragments in the text (and from previous versions of the heroine in texts such as *Un Barrage contre le Pacifique* and *L'Amant)* of the female protagonist's past in order to construct multiple views of the girl's self, a self that is both a subject of

and in discourse. The notion of female selfhood is destabilized by feminist theorists and female authors like Duras who "position woman or femininity outside logocentric time and history in a fluid, timeless, nonsensical, [...] dispersed and decentred, multiple subjectivity" (Smith 1990, 14). This dynamic and multifaceted vision of selfhood is characteristic of women writing contemporary autobiographical texts.

I have already mentioned the role played by the audience's (or the reader's) and other fictional characters' gaze in the young girl's identity formation. Autobiographical rewriting also allows an author to (re)evaluate herself as the words used to describe and create the self are written across the page. Béatrice Bonhomme discusses the importance of the author's self-definition through the gaze and its connection to a form of self-acceptance:

> [P]lus important encore que le regard porté par les autres est peut-être le regard du créateur, de l'écrivain sur elle-même. [...] L'auteur âgée devient créateur de ce personnage qui n'est autre qu'une projection d'elle-même, un souvenir d'elle, enfant. Dès lors ce regard crée le moi, le fait naître et le statufie, l'immobilise dans une présence rayonnante à travers le temps : « Sur le bac, REGARDEZ-MOI [...]. » (*Amt, 24).* (Bonhomme 124)

The Reader's Re-focalization

The oppositions and the ambivalence often associated with Duras's writing continue to pique the curiosity of literary critics and readers alike because the concept of re-presenting polarities such as the ones mentioned above is in Duras intertwined with a complex weaving of autobiographical and fictional elements as well. Rewriting in Duras entails selecting a new frame for material

found in a previous text or adding a new dimension to what is being repeated, thus offering the reader an alternative point of view. The obsessive repetition that is characteristic of Duras's writing can be infectious in that it may inspire a reader to revisit a Durassian text s/he may have read in the past, just as it has done for me. Thus Duras's technique of rewriting often leads to re-reading or a multifaceted reading of any one text. After becoming familiar with several of Duras's texts, a reader's re-encounter with each of these texts is enriched by what s/he has previously read due to the common elements resonating throughout Duras's fictional universe, whether it is a character, place or theme:

> En effet, la reprise et la transformation incessante des mêmes motifs participe ici à la création d'un univers clos et jamais achevé où tout n'est qu'écho, réverbération, rayonnement, où tout se fait recommencement, prolongement, où tout semble finalement s'engendrer et tenir grâce à ce processus sans fin d'écriture et de réécriture. (Bourgeois 5)

These recurring aspects of Duras's writing may be slightly altered from one text to the next (Michael Richardson in *Le Ravissement de Lol V. Stein* becomes Michael Richards in *Le Vice-consul)* or they may be the same (S. Thala in *Le Ravissement de Lol V. Stein* and in *L'Amour).* Rewriting in Duras is unstable since there is no predictable pattern. For Duras, rewriting does not involve a continuation of where she left off. A reader may detect similar elements between texts, but Duras tends to breathe new life into recurrent fictional characters and places, further adding to the intricate and fascinating puzzle and its essentially kaleidoscopic nature.

It is not simply spaces, "people", or elements of the plot that reappear: Duras's rewriting style encompasses stylistic techniques such as recycling vocabulary, dialogue or entire sentences. Since the majority of Duras's texts after 1964 are characterized by fragmentation (either of plot or of the structure of the text itself), the reader needs to be both attentive and active. Duras creates a literary universe where the reader is "invited" to actively engage in giving relative or interpretative "weight" to sentences, passages, or the text as a whole. The Durassian reader has room to create and interpret. This readerly participation adds to the fluidity and multiple meanings associated with the text. For example, Laure Adler assesses the reader's role in *L'Amant* as critical to the novel's success. A text that "speaks" to a variety of readers or allows readers to identify with some aspect of the text creates a personal connection between text and reader:

> True to her method of putting the reader in the position of actor, assembler and decoder, she [Duras] was offering a variety of possible interpretations. The leads were numerous, the openings countless. *The Lover* is an experimental construction site designed to awaken the reader's imagination. This could be why it was so successful, for the reader is the main character and, in reading, rewrites the story. (Adler 347)

It could be argued that perhaps this constant recreation of characters, places, and thematic threads may lead to a serious and unrecoverable fragmentation, shaking and destabilizing the idea of core elements reverberating throughout much of Duras's *oeuvre*. In my opinion, this element of uncertainty and disruption in continuity characterize the typical Durassian text with its lack of unity or finality. As Carol J. Murphy articulates, many of Duras's texts exhibit a

perpetual state of no closure: "Emphasis is thus placed on the deferral of closure, of memory, of climax and of fixed meaning with a resultant accent on process or production" (Murphy 1982, 14). Key examples of this lack of finality or certainty from Duras's texts include the impossibility of being close to the mother without being engulfed (the young girl in *Un Barrage contre le Pacifique*, *L'Amant,* and *L'Amant de la Chine du Nord),* the impossibility of living happily ever after (Sara's and Maria's troubled marriages in *Les Petits Chevaux de Tarquinia* and *Dix heures et démie du soir en été)*, or the origins of madness (Lol in *Le Ravissement de Lol V. Stein* and the vice-consul in *Le Vice-consul)*. The reader is often left with questions unanswered, with a desire to know more.

Lasting Kaleidoscopic Images

One thing that can be said with certainty about Duras and rewriting is that she often rewrites the non-conventional and in so doing destabilizes political, social, racial, and sexual identities. Duras lived (1914 – 1996) and wrote (1943 – 1995) during crucial events in twentieth century French history: colonial Indochina, resistance and collaboration during World War II, the war and decolonization in Algeria, and the Women's Movement (Murphy 2002, 87). Important moments in history coincide with and seem to inspire the writing and rewriting to which we as readers bear witness: a diplomat transgresses colonial boundaries by rebelling against the colonizing group in *Le Vice-consul*. The mother's behaviour in *Un Barrage contre le Pacifique* goes against the image of a

colonizer who is loyal to the mother country. The political context is woven into the story of a young girl's quest for independence and her defiance of established sexual and social norms in *L'Amant* and *L'Amant de la Chine du Nord.*

The Durassian protagonists in the texts chosen for my analysis are typically female. Duras writing women into her texts allows the reader to speculate about the circumstances and conventions women face. For example, as Cohen points out, "*Le Vice-consul* [...] exposes the paucity of possibilities afforded women of all social strata" (Cohen 1982, 341). Durassian women are further complicated by the revision and re-presentation of their situation at a latter point (for example, Anne-Marie Stretter in *Le Vice-consul* [1966] and *India Song [1973]).* The single mother, a recurring female figure in Duras's *oeuvre*, generates discussion about her lack of power and access to language (and a voice) within society while her role within the family is sometimes seen as all powerful: "In Freudian configuration, since the mother cannot access the symbolic order and phallic power, this site of power and language belongs to the father alone [...]" (Siegel 2). Duras rewriting the mother figure permits the reader to detect a common undercurrent in feminist theory on mother-daughter relations: the ambivalence present in the mother-daughter relationship.[5] The daughter may simultaneously experience a desire to differentiate from her mother and a longing to re-experience symbiotic union through identification with the mother. Just as

[5] The ambivalence surrounding a daughter's feelings towards her mother is discussed particularly by Adrienne Rich and Marianne Hirsch.

someone stares into the lens of a kaleidoscope and moves the same reflective mirrors to form different shapes with a simple twist of the tube, the Durassian reader often experiences several interpretations or views of one core element or prism, such as the mother-daughter attachment, thanks to rewriting.

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